Listening to our learners' voices: pupils' constructions of language learning in an urban school

by

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Modern language learning in secondary schools has been described as being in a state of crisis, with ever-decreasing numbers of learners continuing to learn languages longer than is compulsory. This crisis is particularly acute in specific contexts, such as urban areas, resulting in generally differential levels of motivation and achievement according to social background.

The thesis begins with a search for appropriate ways of exploring the problem of demotivation within the above context, building on a number of autobiographical experiences. Firstly, drawing on my early teaching experiences as well as a study of urban education theory, I examine critically the location of the problem, committing myself to understanding ways in which the language learning context itself may serve to empower or disempower the learners in different ways, rather than resorting to deficit approaches. I then draw on positive experiences of flexible learning in the classroom, examining the relationships between motivation and learner autonomy. After an initial ethnographic exploration of language learning in one urban school, this leads to the central focus of the research.

This focus is on children's own constructions of language learning, conceptualised as their metacognitive knowledge and beliefs. Privileging their voices, the research makes use of focused group conversations which have been specifically designed to enable the learners to articulate that which is rarely heard. Through their voices, we are able to build

up a picture of the ways in which these children experience language learning, and, in particular, their perceived opportunities to take control of their learning and the ways in which the curriculum relates to their own life experiences. This offers insights into the complex and dynamic relationships between motivation and different aspects of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs, and enables us to move towards a vision of an inclusive, powerful language learning curriculum for the twenty-first century.

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INTRODUCTION

In November 1996 I presented a paper at the Autonomy 2000 conference in Bangkok. Had I been unaware of developments in South East Asia, however, the idea of a conference on learner autonomy in this part of the world might have seemed strange to me. The reason for this was that British newspapers at the time were full of Government and Ofsted recommendations that our schools adopt a much more traditional, teacher-centred approach, and South East Asian classrooms were being held up as something to aspire to, with their rote learning, teacher centred questioning and ability to achieve excellent examination results despite large class sizes.

Reflecting on the implications of these recommendations for my intended research into the relationship between learner autonomy and motivation in language classrooms in England, it was therefore with some excitement that I read the preface to Nixon, McKeown and Ranson's (1996) book *Encouraging Learning: Towards a Theory of the Learning School.* Referring to a Government report on education reforms (National Commission on Education, 1993), the authors recognised that "we are living through one of those historic periods of change that alter the structure of experience and, as a result, the capacities each person needs to flourish and the relationships that will be needed to sustain autonomy and collective well-being" (Nixon et al., 1996: vii). The key to such personal and social demands is, according to the authors, "the *agency* of the learner" which it explains in the following way:

> "We learn when we have a sense of purpose and such motivation is best likely to grow out of our active participation in creating the projects which are to shape our selves as well as the communities in which we live." (p. vii-viii)

I found it an exciting prospect to explore what education might look like if our learners had the opportunity to be involved in its development, and the ways in which this might change their attitudes towards learning, since this had resonance with my experiences as a languages teacher in secondary schools developing flexible learning programmes in order to motivate my classes.

Well into my research, I came across a chapter by Ranson (1998) on the future of educational research in which he called for a theory of learning which would encompass notions of agency, motivation and self-development, and be based on studies of how people learn in different contexts, not just within schools, colleges and universities, but also, for example, at home, in the community, and at work. Once again I found correspondence with my own questions, as well as reassurance that they were important and contemporary. In Ranson's words:

> "If one of the central tasks of our time is to transform the way people think of themselves and what they are capable of, then it is only by changing the sense students have of themselves as learners that they will begin to develop their capacities and realise their potential. [...]
>
> Learning itself begins with a sense of discovery of new knowledge or skills. But the deeper significance of learning lies through its forming of our powers and capacities, in our unfolding agency, in our understanding of who we are and what we can do as a person. Such learning depends on motivation - and the motivation young people need to sustain this self-development can only grow out of an understanding that the struggle to develop as a person has some point." (p. 52-53)

Further reassurance was found in Beveridge's (1998: 96) challenge to the educational research community, which seemed to reflect more of the flavour of education as contestation and the discourse of conflict and paradox that had been developing in my own research. Beveridge suggested that the challenge is "how to reconcile the conflicting needs of individuals and control, the problem of how to maximise flexibility and freedom while maintaining integrity and quality". Furthermore, in a reference to a report written by himself and David Hargreaves for the Leverhulme Trust in 1995, he also indicated the need to examine the role of metacognition in encouraging responsiveness to change ("learning to learn and its relation to flexibility" (Beveridge, 1998: 96)). Such challenges were indeed at the heart of my research.

As part of this thesis I intend to explore some of the principles and underlying assumptions on which the curriculum is based in order to contextualise the research itself. This involves an exploration of the ways in which social conditions of power and control make it frustratingly difficult for certain groups to have any voice or influence in what is happening. The main purpose of the thesis, however, is to propose a 'powerful' curriculum model for modern languages education in secondary schools, based on the voices of a specific group of young language learners from a specific social context.

The picture of modern language learning that I shall be exploring here is thus different from that which is normally seen. There are various reasons for this: firstly, it is a view from a different angle, namely that of the learners; secondly, it is a view which is affected by a number of filters, namely those of my personal autobiography and my academic background; thirdly, it is a view which has been informed by a range of background sources, drawing on different disciplines and sub-disciplines which are rarely brought together; fourthly, the reader will read it wearing his or her own pair of spectacles, bringing to it an additional, external perspective.

At various points throughout the thesis, the theme of relatedness will appear. It appears in my own personal experiences, in the background literature, and in learners' own perceptions of their experiences of learning and school. I shall, of course, also show how my research philosophy and design are related to my autobiography, and the theoretical perspectives I have drawn on and developed. Furthermore, it influences my approach to literature as I draw on a range of disciplines, in order to allow for cross-fertilisation of ideas as much as to explain my own positionality.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCHER

There is a further sub-plot to this thesis, namely the story of my development as a researcher. I cannot deny that I made mistakes. This would be difficult to avoid for anyone in any circumstances. (Indeed, since we learn from our mistakes, I would

argue that it would also be undesirable to avoid making mistakes.) As a researcher without direct access to supervision, however, I was always aware of potential flaws and I felt particularly vulnerable to the usual psychological ups and downs of the PhD process. My 'therapy' for this was to track my own development, the growth of my awareness and questions, by means of my research journal. In this I could note down any ideas, no matter how outlandish, and have 'conversations' with myself.

There is not space enough to give a full account of this development (which would probably constitute a PhD in its own right). However, I do attempt to include an autobiographical element to the thesis, tracking the influences, both previous and contemporaneous, on the personal theories which underpin my research. This is extremely important for me, not only because of its contribution to the validity and credibility of the research, offering a picture of where it is coming from and what I am bringing to it and, hence, an insight into what I might *not* be asking but should be, but because it represents what I have come to understand as the point of PhD research - the process of development as a researcher and the growth of research confidence as much as competence. To focus on my 'findings' without attempting to offer some representation of this growth would, for me, mean that I was omitting an important aspect.

STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This thesis begins with a broad question concerning the relationship between learner autonomy and language learning within the context of an urban secondary school. Part One explores the rationale behind this in a number of ways, as well as my search for a more specific focus. The first chapter explores the context of the question, beginning with general national concerns about achievement and disaffection particularly in urban areas, as well as the current 'crisis' in language learning, before moving on to my own positioning within this field of investigation. This includes not only autobiographical aspects relating to my interest in learner autonomy, but also those which relate to my study of urban education. This latter theoretical exploration is significant as it explains my ontological positioning with regard to location of the 'problem' not in the individual but in social and educational structures, and hence my commitment to hearing the voices of the learners. The second chapter then explores the literature, focusing on the overlap between motivation and learner autonomy, and the third chapter describes the first stage of my research, namely an ethnographic prologue during which time I was searching for a precise focus as well as an appropriate research method.

Part Two of the thesis then describes the main part of the research. Privileging learners' voices, I investigate learners' constructions of language learning (construed as metacognitive knowledge and beliefs) and ways in which these relate to specific motivational beliefs, namely locus of control, attribution and relatedness, with a view to understanding the experience of language learning from the learners'

perspective and proposing a languages curriculum based on their voices. Chapter Four describes the design of the research, introducing the concept of focused group conversations, before Chapters Five, Six, Seven and Eight explore and analyse the learners' voices. Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by considering the implications of the research for the development of an inclusive and powerful languages curriculum.

PART ONE: FINDING THE FOCUS

1. THE BROAD CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

1.1. INTRODUCTION

For sixteen years, until 1995, I taught French and German, mainly in inner city secondary schools in London, which drew many of their pupils from the housing estates of boroughs such as Lambeth and Haringey. These years were highly rewarding. The stimulation of working with children from richly varied backgrounds was an experience which led to my continued commitment both to language teaching and learning, and to urban education. Nevertheless, the experiences were not without challenge, the main one being the need to motivate learners firstly to learn during the compulsory years of language learning (until the latter years, this was between eleven and fourteen only), and then to continue to learn languages beyond these years. In addition, and particularly after the Education Reform Act of 1988, the drive to raise achievement in terms of examination results became an added pressure.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the broad context of my research. By this I mean those features which have led me to my research questions as well as to my commitment to research in a particular way. The context as referred to in this chapter consists of the following aspects:

1. The context of urban secondary schools in England, with a focus on problems of educational achievement, motivation and language learning.

2. My autobiographical context, including my positioning within the language teaching context.
3. The theoretical underpinnings to the research, namely theories drawn from urban education which influenced both the focus of the research and the research methodology.

It will be seen that all of these aspects are interrelated on two levels: firstly, a common denominator is the urban context, and the related phenomenon of differential achievement and motivation; secondly, as a teacher and researcher I am also common to all aspects, since my autobiography includes personal experiences of learning and teaching languages in these contexts, as well as studying urban theory. Without some exploration of this broader context, then, it would be impossible to understand what has driven the research itself.

1.2. ACHIEVEMENT IN URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENGLAND

Though the focus of my research is on motivation and demotivation/disaffection, no contextualisation of this can avoid the issue of achievement. Since the 1988 Education Reform Act, official reports and policies as well as the media have focused increasingly on issues of 'underachievement' and 'raising achievement' in schools in England. There has been constant criticism of declining education standards, such as that made by Sir Claus Moser in 1990, in which he suggested that the majority of children in the country "have educational experiences not worthy of a civilized nation" (quoted in Nixon et al., 1996: 12).

Nevertheless, whilst recognising that the measurement of achievement is itself a problematic issue, it would appear from comparative research carried out in 2001 (the PISA study) that the UK is amongst the top ten countries (of the 32 countries studied) in terms of mathematical (fifth), scientific (fourth) and reading literacy (eighth) scores (OECD, 2001). Government figures also suggest academic improvement in schools. For example, the DfES has reported ongoing improvement in GCSE results, with the 2004 results showing an overall increase of grades A*-C by 1.1 percentage points to 59.2% (compared to a 0.2 percentage point rise in 2003), and an improvement in boys' grades A*-C by 1.3 percentage points compared to 0.9 for girls (DfES 26 August 2004: http://www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2004_0147). Overall, however, the number of passes at age 16 remained the same with regard to traditional GCSEs, and dropped by 0.1% when new job-related courses were taken into account, revealing a widening of the gap between the best and worst performers (TES 26 August 2004: http://www.tes.co.uk/search/search_display.asp?section =Breaking+News+Stories&sub_section=Breaking+News&id=398942&Type=0).

The PISA study, however, also reported a particular feature of the UK education system, namely that the UK was sixth from bottom in terms of equality of opportunity to achieve, leading David Milliband, schools standards minister at the time, to state in January 2003 that England has one of the "most unequal education systems in the industrialised world" (TES, 2003). It showed, in fact, that the UK has one of the largest attainment gaps between rich and poor students in the

developed world, with 'poor' children being only a third as likely to get five GCSEs at Grades A*-C than others. This is, of course, not a new situation. Other official reports which have highlighted this have been issued by the House of Commons Education Committee (1995), the National Commission on Education (1993, 1996), and, more recently, the Treasury (HM Treasury, 1999). OFSTED has reported on the achievement gap, stating that relatively few schools with high levels of disadvantage achieve results which reach the national average (OFSTED, 2000, 2000a). More recently, the DfES has referred explicitly to the link between poverty and underachievement in its strategy statement of 2002:

> "There is a demonstrable link between poverty and underachievement. 2001 figures show that, on average, while two-thirds of pupils in schools in more prosperous areas get five good GCSEs, only a fifth in schools with the poorest intake achieve the same." (DfES, 2002: 7)

This is also reinforced by the Social Exclusion Unit, whose website contains the following statement:

> "Not all children have an equal chance to achieve their potential at school. Growing up in a family with financial difficulties is closely correlated with poor school attendance, poor literacy, poor numeracy and low qualifications. Inadequate adult interest and involvement in childrens (sic) development coupled with a lack of opportunities to learn at home lead to low expectations and lay the foundation for failure or underachievement in too many instances." (Social Exclusion Unit, 2004 (last revised 08/07/04): http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/page.asp?id=180#page-top)

It also points out that "in schools with high levels of disadvantage... 8.6% leave school with no GCSE grade A-G against the national average of 4.3%" (ibid.)

Demographic trends in England's cities mean that these issues of inequality are particularly acute in such contexts. In 1990-91, Her Majesty's Senior Chief Inspector Eric Bolton (1990, 1991) praised the improvements in achievement and levels of participation beyond 16 since 1988, but went on to claim that one in three children still received a poor standard of education, and that these were largely represented in the inner cities and amongst the less academically able. The issue is now recognised in a number of Government initiatives which originated largely in the School Effectiveness Unit. A specific example is the Excellence in Cities (EiC) policy which:

> "tackles the particular problems facing children in our cities. Through a combination of initiatives, it aims to raise the aspirations and achievements of pupils and to tackle disaffection, social exclusion, truancy and indiscipline and improve parents' confidence in cities." (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/excellence/abouteic/)

Of course, terms such as 'disadvantage' and 'underachievement' are problematic. For example, schools serving areas of disadvantage are defined in the following way in an OFSTED report (2000a: 10):

> "They have in common a preponderance of families on low income, in poor housing and with little experience of education beyond compulsory schooling. Only a small minority of parents work in the professions; many are in low-paid manual or service jobs or unemployed. In some cases families are exceptionally troubled. The communities are affected, to different degrees, by bleak surroundings and poor facilities, by poor health, by dislocation and disaffection, and by high levels of alcohol and drug abuse. Trouble can wait, literally, at the school gates. It sometimes comes through them: one school visited had suffered 274 burglaries or break-ins in one year."

A depressing picture indeed, but one which depicts an extreme situation located in specific areas. A different picture is painted by Gillborn and Mirza (2000) who

point to differences in attainment along the lines of social class, gender, and, particularly powerfully, ethnicity. In other words, without denying the significant effects of poverty on educational achievement, the evidence reviewed in this study shows that inequalities of achievement affect children from a much broader spectrum than those living in conditions as described above. In post-war Britain, for example, pupils from the working class have consistently been found to be getting poorer results and not progressing to higher education (Brown, 1987: 11). DfEE statistics in 1999 showed that children from the 'unskilled manual' social group (as defined by the Youth Cohort Study of England and Wales) were more than three times less likely to gain five or more GCSE grades A*-C than children from the managerial and professional classes, and that this inequality had increased since the late 1980s (DfEE, 1999: 9).

Research has been revealing strong links between achievement and the social conditions in which pupils live for many years (Halsey, Heath and Ridge, 1980; Mortimore et al., 1988; Rutter et al., 1979). Gibson and Asthana (1998), for example, looked at the links between the socio-economic context and school-level performance, using a postcode-census method to examine 259 schools in twelve LEAs, and concluding that performance statistics which fail to contextualise the schools are flawed. Though not suggesting that this link is deterministic, accepting that some pupils in these schools achieve well, they warn against diverting attention "from the single most striking characteristic of the English education system; the

manner in which schooling serves to reflect, perhaps even reinforce, existing patterns of social advantage" (p. 280).

1.3. DISAFFECTION IN URBAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The broad issue of motivation in schools is often discussed in negative terms, namely concerns with apparently rising levels of disaffection as manifested in disruptive behaviour, truancy and school exclusion levels. The Elton Report in 1989 (DES, 1989) pointed out high levels of (mostly low level) disruption, particularly amongst boys. Barber's survey of 10,000 pupils in English schools revealed high levels of class disruption (33% said that their learning was disrupted on a daily basis), and concluded that "In addition to the disappeared and disruptive, there are the disappointed and disinterested" (Barber, 1994). Similarly, teachers' unions have shown concern, with, for example, Nigel de Gruchy at the NAS/UWT stating that "disruptive pupils are the highest barrier to raising standards in schools" (Times, 25 October 1996, quoted in Haydn, 1997). This has led to increasing numbers of pupils either being excluded from schools or absenting themselves. In 1990-91, official DfEE figures revealed 2,910 exclusions, but by 1995-96 this had increased to 12,476 (DFE, 1995) (though independent research put this figure at 13,581 (Parsons 1998)). In 1998, the Social Exclusion Unit was still reporting increasing exclusions (SEU, 1998; DfEE, 1996). Although the figures dropped to 9,540 in 2001-2, they have recently started to rise again (http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk/page.asp?id=301, updated 28/07/2004).

As with achievement statistics, the data is further complicated by apparent inequalities. The 1998 Social Exclusion Report revealed that greater concentrations of exclusions were appearing in areas of social deprivation, with the highest figures being recorded in inner and outer London. There are also well-reported disparities according to ethnicity, with exclusion rates of Black pupils and pupils of Mixed ethnic origin being around twice that for White pupils (DfES, 2004).

In terms of truancy, another manifestation of disaffection, the Social Exclusion Unit figures (1998) showed that at least one million children were playing truant every year. It also claims that these figures had not changed significantly by 2002/3, at which time the percentage of half days missed due to truancy (unauthorised absences) was 0.7%. A closer examination of DfES statistics once again reveals disparity between Local Education Authorities. Out of 150 LEAs, fifteen had levels of unauthorised absence above 2% from secondary maintained schools in England. All of these LEAs were located in cities such as London, Nottingham, Bradford and Hull. Sheffield, with 2.02% was in 146th position (DfES, 2003).

These figures could also, however, be an underrepresentation of the actual figures. Previous research using anonymous pupil questionnaires (Gray & Jesson, 1990; O'Keefe, 1994) suggested, for example, that both blanket truancy (not attending school at all) and post-registration truancy (non-attendance at lessons) were at the time much bigger problems than the official figures suggested. About one third of the 38,000 students surveyed for the Truancy Unit's 1994 DFE study admitted

playing truant at least once during the previous six weeks and ten per cent of sixteen year olds said they were truanting at least once a week (O'Keefe, 1994). Indeed, high levels of truancy have been confirmed recently by a report of the House of Commons education select committee (TES, Michael Shaw, 25 July 2003: 9) into the cost-effectiveness of Ofsted. The committee expressed concern over the reports of the Chief Inspector, David Bell, which stated that truancy had remained constant in spite of strategies to improve attendance. The TES reported that "a DfES spokesman said the department agreed it was unacceptable that 50,000 children missed school on an average day".

1.4. MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ENGLAND

Within this overall picture of underachievement and disaffection particularly in the inner cities, concern is increasing regarding pupils' learning of modern languages. In 1998, achievement at GCSE was well below the average of all subjects across the curriculum (Saunders, 1998). Since then, overall GCSE results have shown overall improvement year on year, but, according to the Ofsted report for 2002-3, "over the last six years, the rate of improvement in teaching and achievement in modern foreign languages (MFL) has been slow in comparison with other subjects" (Ofsted, 2004a: 2). In 2003, for example, 44.6% of pupils were awarded a grade C or better in French, 51.2% in German, and 48.0% in Spanish, compared with 55.2% across all subjects. These figures do mark an improvement since 1996 (when the figures were 43.4% for French, 49% for German, and 43.4% for Spanish), but they are still behind average results in other subjects and, even more worryingly,

they represent a considerable fall in achievement compared with the figures for 2002 (47% in French, 53.0% in German, and 49.3% in Spanish) (Ofsted, 2004).

In England, the learning of a foreign language only became compulsory for most students aged eleven to sixteen in the 1990s. In many ways this was not an easy process. As the Nuffield Languages Inquiry (2000) suggested, "at the moment, by any reliable measure, we are doing badly" (p. 5). This is hardly surprising, however, given the context in which language learning exists, with generally negative attitudes towards the need to learn languages, poor levels of adult proficiency, and less than ideal teaching conditions (for example, children start language learning later than other subjects, and timetable time in schools is often insufficient compared to other European countries, or oblivious to the most appropriate conditions for language learning such as length of lesson) (Chambers, 1992; Milton and Meara, 1998; Pachler, 2002; Saunders, 1998). In fact, it could be said that the language teaching profession has done remarkably well under these circumstances, given the significant improvement in examination results alongside an exponential increase in numbers learning languages up to the age of sixteen (Mitchell, 2002).

The issue of motivation to learn foreign languages in an English-speaking country is subject to a number of assumptions. Recent changes in Key Stage 4, effective from September 2004, have made language learning an 'entitlement' rather than a compulsory part of the curriculum for pupils aged fourteen and upwards. This new policy is partly a result of the Government's perception of language learning as difficult

and unpopular. Given the context of the Government's concern that "in a league table of participation rates for 17 year-olds we are equal 25th out of 29 OECD countries, ahead of just Greece, Mexico and Turkey" (DfES, 2003a: 9), their desire to make the curriculum more flexible, "particularly where students struggle with a subject in which they have little interest or aptitude" (ibid.: 22), is understandable. In fact, pupils have been allowed to stop learning a language before the age of sixteen for a number of years in some schools through liberal use of disapplication (meant for pupils who for some exceptional reason are judged to require a reduced timetable). Indeed, data from 2002 suggests that 36,000 pupils or 6% of the age group were being disapplied (DfES, 2002a). Furthermore, an Association for Language Learning survey carried out also in 2002 revealed that, out of 200 responses, 30% of schools were planning to make languages optional from September 2002, effectively jumping the gun as soon as the Green Paper proposing this change was published. Even more worryingly, this survey of ALL members revealed that languages had been optional for more than five years in some schools (Association for Language Learning, 2002).

As the ALL survey in 2002 discovered,

> "there is a range of motivational forces, not all to do with the learners' needs or attitudes, for *de facto* disapplication in languages as opposed to other subjects (see, for example, Part IX Comments S3(5,6,7,11), B5&B6), e.g.
>
> a) the perception of senior management that languages are difficult and academic
>
> b) problems with language staffing

c) the perceived difficulty of languages GCSE, which encourages disapplication in order to improve statistics and a school's place in league tables (NALA experiences recorded in online discussion on disapplication, 6-7 February 2002)

d) disapplication of pupils who are unlikely to get a C at GCSE and therefore unable to progress to AS/A2 (see Part IX Comments S3(3))." (ALL, 2002: Part IV section 1)

Here it is schools' senior management teams who are perceiving languages as being difficult and uninteresting and making it possible for pupils to stop learning languages, supporting the claim of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry that 'school managers themselves sometimes have little awareness of the importance of languages, leaving language teachers struggling against a tide of indifference" (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 46). Where languages are already, or are becoming optional, numbers continuing to learn them are thus influenced by a number of factors apart from pupil attitudes. (See also *Language Trends 2003*, a survey carried out by CILT, ALL and UCML, 2003).

Nevertheless, even if we accept that structural obstacles play a role in discouraging language learning, it is still clear that motivation is a key issue for the future of language learning, and plays a central role in the languages strategy for England (DfES, 2002b). As Lid King, the National Director for Languages, wrote when he was Director of CILT,

> "Motivation is thus a major issue for all learning but perhaps in particular for language learning." (King, 2003: 5)

The above 2003 survey revealed very high rates of drop out in Year 10 (Y10) (above 50%) in 22% of schools responding to the survey, and in most cases this represented a

reduction in numbers compared with their Y11 pupils. Given that, in 2004, the number of pupils taking French GCSE in this Y11 cohort already represented a drop of four per cent, with German entries dropping three per cent, (despite a three per cent rise in the number of 15-year-olds), the situation for 2005 and beyond is not promising.

Even before the current policy developments, however, there were indicators of inadequate motivation to learn languages. For example, it has been increasingly rare for pupils to study more than one language; as the preliminary report of the Nuffield Languages Inquiry found in 1998, only about five per cent of secondary school pupils opted to study a second modern language at GCSE level compared to ten per cent five years previously (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 1998: 38). In addition, fewer and fewer learners were opting to study languages beyond the age of sixteen. In fact, the Nuffield Report stated that nine out of ten students stopped learning a language at the age of sixteen (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 50). Reasons for this included "an insufficiently stimulating curriculum for MFL for ages 14-16" (Boaks, 1998: 41). Of course, this means that beyond school there are fewer university students studying languages as a specialist subject (Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 55). Between 1998 and 2001, there was an overall drop in accepted applicants to university language degree courses: French showed a reduction of 20.68%, German 16.75%, Russian 33.02% and Italian 15.62%, though Spanish showed an increase of 2.34%. This is even more concerning when one considers that the overall number of accepted applicants to all degree courses rose by 8.79% between those years (Kelly, 2002). The vicious circle continues then as teacher

education courses struggle to recruit language graduates, particularly those with two foreign languages (Asher, 1999; Towell, 1998).

The situation with regard to achievement and motivation is thus even more acute in languages than in most other subjects. Furthermore, in parallel with the broader educational picture, there is disparity of achievement in different groups. For example, there is a greater difference between boys' and girls' achievement in languages than elsewhere (see, for example, Barton, 1997; Callaghan, 1998; The Nuffield Languages Inquiry, 2000: 46; Place, 1997). In 1992, when overall GCSE results showed 66% of boys gaining grades A-C compared with 76% of girls, only 26% of boys achieved A-C in languages, and 43% of girls (Clark & Trafford, 1996: 40-49). By 2002-3, despite overall improvement in these figures, a 16% gap between girls and boys remained (Ofsted, 2004). Similarly, differences in motivation have also been observed, with girls showing higher motivation to learn languages generally than boys (Barton, 2001; Loulidi, 1990; Williams, Burden and Lanvers, 2002).

With regard to social inclusion, a survey carried out by CILT and the Times Educational Supplement in 2002 (CILT and TES, 2002) confirmed the findings of the 2002 ALL survey (ALL, 2002: Part III, sections 13 and 14) that 16% of schools with less than 8% of children on free school meals were planning to make, or had already made, languages optional, and that this figure increased as the percentage of free school meals increased, reaching 53% of schools with over 50%

of children on free school meals. The actual figures turned out to be even more worrying, as confirmed by *Language Trends 2003*:

> "The results confirm last year's findings that the policy is having a disproportionate effect on lower ability pupils, and that schools with high percentages of pupils on free school meals and low GCSE pass rates are more likely to have withdrawn languages from the compulsory curriculum. 70% of responding schools with more than 10% of pupils on free school meals had made languages optional, as opposed to 31% of those where fewer than 10% of pupils had free school meals. 67% of responding schools with half or fewer of their pupils gaining 5 A*-C at GCSE had made languages optional, whereas only 38% of schools with higher-attaining pupils had done so." (CILT, ALL and UCML, 2003)

The implication of this is that the already existent class bias of languages in higher education will be exacerbated in future years. According to UCAS data, of all subjects studied at university, only medicine has fewer students from Social Classes IV and V. *Language Trends 2003* (CILT/ALL/UCML, 2003) reports that only 12% of entrants to university language departments come from what could be described as the working classes (those involved in semi-routine or routine occupations), less than the average for all subjects which, at 15%, still represents considerable inequality.

1.5. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTION

Beginning my teaching career in 1978, I found myself working in a very similar context, teaching in four secondary schools in London and one in Derbyshire. Throughout this time I was preoccupied with the question of where the problems described are located.

This questioning began at an early stage in my career. As a young teacher working in a stressful, 'difficult' London school, I found it only too tempting to look for explanations of these problems in the pupils and their families themselves, complaining of their lack of care or ambition. After a short while, however, I started to reflect on my own background. A product of comprehensive education, I was the first in my family to stay at school beyond the age of sixteen, yet I understood why most of cousins left school at the first possible opportunity. I was also aware of the fact the family was very tightly knit, very protective and caring, but that they occupied a world where the 'culture' (in its broadest sense) was different from the world of teachers and schools. In some cases, shortage of money meant that children needed to get a job as soon as possible. Though ambition did not include the possibility of becoming doctors, lawyers or teachers, this did not represent a *lack* of ambition; the ambition to get a good, clean job in an office or shop was an aspiration in a family which had a history of working in the coal mines and factories of Lancashire. And school was not always perceived as being the most appropriate way out of a short-term situation.

This reflection eventually led me to further formal study of urban education in order to explore alternative explanations for the phenomena of underachievement and apparent disaffection. This was a highly influential period of study for me, which made me realise that what I was facing was an ontological question with a powerful and influential sociological background. In order to locate the 'problem' with regard to inequality, I realised, it is necessary to engage with issues of power

and resistance, and to explore sociological concepts. The next section analyses some of this vast literature in order to locate my own position as an educator and researcher. It will go some way to explaining my commitment to understanding the world from the perspective of those whose voices are seldom heard, namely the pupils in an urban secondary school, as well as to looking for ways in which the modern languages curriculum might be changed in the light of these voices, in order to become more inclusive.

1.6. URBAN EDUCATION

The aim of this section is not to offer a comprehensive review of the theories which address the issue of inequality in education, but rather to describe in a modest way how the literature was influential in my research. My intention is to explore ways of interrogating the phenomena of differential achievement and disaffection in order to offer insights into my own experience and thus suggest a way of exploring the issue which is of concern to me, namely the relationship between motivation and autonomy in language learning.

This section begins with an exploration of sociological perspectives on the urban question and how these lead to different interpretations of inequality. Applied to urban education theories, we are led to a commitment to examining critically terms such as underachievement and disaffection in order to avoid the problems being located in those suffering the consequences of such inequality. The chapter then goes on to reconceptualise disaffection, exploring notions of resistance, agency and

voice. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reflection on the impact of this literature on my own research, and a statement of commitment to particular principles.

1.6.1. Theories of Consensus and Conflict in Urban Education

The study of urban education has largely been influenced by sociological perspectives on the urban question (Bash, Coulby and Jones., 1985; Grace, 1984). These can be seen in terms of those based on theories of consensus and those based on theories of conflict. The former are based on the functionalist sociology of Durkheim (1893) in which society functions as a living organism in which the independent parts, such as the economy, the government, the family, the education system, are "held together not by a central nervous system but by a central value system, a set of social guidelines called norms based on underlying moral consensus, or collective consciousness" (Slattery, 1992: 63). Though not denying that there will be social conflicts within this system, Durkheim's focus was on gradual social adaptation rather than on political conflict. Durkheim's work was inspired by the transition from a traditional to a modern society, perceived mainly as the transition from a rural to an urban, industrialised society. As such, urban was defined as a particular space (the city as opposed to the countryside) with particular socio-cultural aspects. Thus, urban society's particular life-forms are seen to evolve in an organic way to form an entity with interdependent parts. On the whole cities grow, develop, change and adapt themselves in a natural way, following the Darwinian laws of nature. These theories inspired early sociological studies of the

city such as the Chicago School which, in the 1920s, depicted the city as divided into distinct zones circling out from the centre, each of which 'bred' its own way of life and in which occasional skirmishes for supremacy took place (Park and Burgess, 1925). This was further developed by Wirth who focused particularly on the zone of transition, an area characterised by struggle and criminality (Wirth, 1938).

Conflict theories, on the other hand, claim that there is nothing 'natural' about urban society, that on the contrary there are powerful forces which influence life in ways which can be either beneficial or detrimental to certain sectors of the population. Thus, Weberian theories examine the influence of those with political power over those without power. Pahl (1968, 1975), for example, argued that cities are controlled by faceless bureaucrats ('urban gatekeepers') who allocate space and control the distribution of resources such as transport and education. As cities grow in complexity, the bureaucracy increases, eroding democracy and alienating the population. Pahl's theories involved an attempt to locate these gatekeepers, and to understand the values which underpinned their decisions. He was particularly concerned to highlight the ways in which certain sectors of the population were affected more adversely than others. His theories contrast, therefore, with consensus theories, as they recognise that inequality can result from the decisions of powerful groups rather than simply from the weaknesses of particular sections of the population. The stakes are loaded against certain people, offering an explanation for the success or failure of particular groups.

However, Pahl's theories have been criticised by other theorists operating within the conflict paradigm, who point out that these urban gatekeepers themselves are operating within a bigger system. Saunders (1981), for example, has written about the 'receding locus of power' whereby local policy can only be understood within the framework of national policy, which can only be understood in the context of the economy and the national and international forces of capitalism. As such, Saunders is representing a broader conflict theory which can trace its roots back to the Frankfurt School of critical theory, which analysed in an interdisciplinary, 'critical' way forms of domination in contemporary society. Despite using a Marxist framework, these early critical theorists did not, however, restrict themselves to the conflict between those who control the means of production and those who have to sell their labour, as they were as critical of communist states as of capitalist ones. Instead, they explored all forms of domination, from capitalist industrialism to modern technology and the culture industry. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore critical theory in detail, nor is it possible to analyse the work of the many theorists who continue the work in diverse ways. Suffice it to say, that a critical approach involves a recognition that dominant ideologies exist and work to subjugate others, and that issues of control and power permeate all aspects of society. However, a further implication relevant to this research is that in such theories it is possible that the 'urban' loses its spatial specificity, becoming synonymous with, for example, advanced capitalist societies. Castells, for example, sees cities as merely the control centres which orchestrate aspects of 'collective

consumption' (public transport, education, healthcare, housing) in ways which ensure that the economy can succeed and that the powerful can remain powerful (Castells, 1977, 1978). The dominant forces impact in ways which reach beyond the cities.

Turning now specifically to urban education, the above theories enable us to analyse underachievement and disaffection, as well as educational responses to these problems, from different perspectives. Within a consensus paradigm, the fact that certain pupils underachieve or lack motivation is a symptom of deficit, and educational policies will thus locate the problems in the individuals, the families, the social class or the ethnic or cultural group. Schools are viewed as ideologically neutral institutions which are there to make up for these deficits, thereby allowing access to wider society. One example of this can be seen in assimilationist approaches to cultural and linguistic diversity, in which the teaching of English as an additional language (EAL) to minority ethnic groups is considered to be the only intervention needed to grant access to all aspects of society (for discussion of this, see Lamb, 1998b, 1999a, 1999b).

Approaching differential achievement and motivation from a conflict perspective leads to a relocation of the problems. Such analyses look to power conflicts existing in the structure of society for an explanation for inequality. Thus, the learning of English will not in itself grant minority ethnic groups automatic access to society, since the issue of racism on an individual and societal level will still exert

a powerful force (Lamb, 1999b). Similarly, special educational responses to children from areas of high unemployment will be insufficient to make up for the severe inequality which exists in society (Robinson, 1997: 17). Such an interpretation of the situation may encourage us to look to broader social, political and economic change to improve the situation, and not just to change on the part of those who are suffering disadvantage. Such broad change includes the education system, since schools themselves reinforce in various ways the inequalities. A conflict perspective thus leads to a rejection of the idea that schools exist in a social and political vacuum. According to Ball:

> "The idea that human sciences like educational studies stand outside or above the political agenda of the management of the population or somehow have a neutral status embodied in a free-floating progressive rationalism are dangerous and debilitating conceits." (Ball, 1997: 264)

In order to study education, then, it is important to understand the broader context of power in which it exists, since its organisation and content are fundamentally influenced by values relating to its role in shaping society, and express cultural and political purposes. This has led to a range of theoretical interpretations, which can only be very briefly sketched here, in order to illuminate ways in which critical, conflict perspectives enabled me to develop my own perspective on my research area.

The idea that education should seek to place children into their 'correct' place in society is by no means new, having its roots in Plato's *Republic*. Education is seen to play a key role in society as it has the task of socialisation and selection of

workers and citizens (Parsons, 1961; Althusser, 1972). Explored from a critical perspective, however, this leads to social and cultural reproduction, with schools reinforcing the domination of elite groups and maintaining the status quo. According to the correspondence theory of Bowles and Gintis (1976), for example, the school tailors learners' attitudes to enable them to take up their place in society. Through the hidden and overt curriculum, working class children are taught primarily to follow rules, to be punctual and to carry out 'menial' tasks, whereas the elite are taught to develop leadership qualities, to think creatively and to value autonomy. This is of course a purely Marxist account of education, pointing towards a direct correspondence of education and the economy. Other radical versions perceive the school as having relative autonomy from the factory, yet still legitimating failure and stratifying society through hegemonic practices in which power and ideology are embedded in the structures, attitudes, and commonsensical, taken-for-granted social arrangements of schools (Gramsci, 1992, 1994; Lukes, 1974). Hargreaves's (1967) structural explanation for the failure of the working classes, for example, describes how streaming, though accepted by pupils in the early years, leads to pro- and anti-school attitudes and the formation of an anti-school sub-culture as the 'bottom' sets experience failure and rejection. He also describes how such failure results from the inability of working class pupils to succeed according to middle class performance tools. In turn, as job aspirations are shaped by school performance, the 'bottom' sets are effectively being prepared for unskilled labour. Such theories have resonance in today's debates about the

continued existence of independent schools and grammar schools, and the widening gaps in achievement between schools in different areas of our cities.

In cultural reproduction theories, the process is more subtle but no less effective. Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital and habitus, for example, largely influenced by Gramsci's ideas on education, ideology and hegemony, analyse how culture is reproduced in order to try to maintain consent. Thus, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) have claimed that there is continuity between the values of the school and the bourgeoisie's requirements of the school. For those children who share the same values and broad cultural understandings, there is greater chance of success. Foucault's work goes further than this, suggesting that the school is characterised by a "disciplinary technology", designed to create "a docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1977: 198). His concept of 'subjugated knowledges', "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: native knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Foucault in Gordon, 1980: 82), suggest what happens to children from particular backgrounds when knowledge and power combine in a "regime of truth" (Beechey and Donald, 1985: 93).

The concept of a 'gap' between school and home experiences, together with its impact on learning, and ways in which education might perpetuate it, offers a useful starting point for understanding and researching underachievement and disaffection.

Studies have suggested that this gap can be reinforced by differences in language and speech style (Erickson and Schultz, 1982) or in patterns of interaction (Heath, 1982), or by discrepancies in social political values (Willis, 1977), all of which can lead to forms of alienation. Williams (1963) has brought notions of culture, either in the sense of 'low' and 'high' culture or in the sense of "a whole way of life" into the educational context, and this has been carried forward in identity, gender, and ethnicity studies which have developed through postmodernist debate.

In order to conclude this section, it is important to state that conflict theories do not necessarily imply that teachers and others involved in education are consciously and actively involved in the maintenance of the status quo. Nevertheless, these theories enable us to question the essentially conservative nature of schools, curricula and teachers, and how the assumptions which underpin these form a formidable apparatus which has the effect of promoting certain sectors of the population more than others. According to Nixon et al. (1996: 45-47), this apparatus consists of assumptions about who education is for, assumptions about the learning process, assumptions about the curriculum, assumptions about educational institutions, and assumptions about the organizing principles of the system. They go on to say:

> "Thus an education has denied, or at best ignored, what the conditions of learning require: a sense of purpose and of commitment to, and responsibility for, personal development. Instead, for many, a pervasive sense of futility has been generated. The assumptions underlying selection are deeply inscribed in the economic, social and political transformations of our time. Our argument is that the sources of underachievement lie in the structures which have eroded the conditions for motivation: people

> do not take learning seriously because they are not encouraged to take their lives and capacities seriously." (Nixon et al., 1996: 46-47)

A further implication of the literature I have briefly explored is that the terms we use and the assumptions which underpin them and which are, in turn, reinforced by them, need to be examined critically. The term 'underachievement' itself has been criticised as unhelpful since it can itself reinforce the idea that the reason for underachievement is located in the groups themselves, thereby reinforcing particular stereotypes, and thus expectations, of different groups whether based on social class, ethnicity or gender (see, for example, Foster, Gomm and Hammersley, 1996; Halsey et al., 1980; Gillborn, 1990). In the same way, the term 'disaffection' also needs to be examined, and here too conflict theories can lead us to a reconceptualisation.

1.6.2. Reconceptualising disaffection: theories of resistance and voice

The above reproduction theories have been criticised for tending towards structural determinism. Without ignoring the power of the hegemonic forces, it is important to recognise the possibility of individual/group agency in resisting them. There is indeed a vast literature on resistance theory which has made a vital contribution to our understandings of the ways in which students can respond to their lived social and cultural experiences in schools. Influential examples include Everhart (1983), Fine (1989), Giroux (1983), Giroux and McLaren (1989), McLaren (1989, 1995), and Willis (1977). They have in common the idea that human beings are not the pawns

of society, but are capable of human agency, defined by Mirón and Lauria (1998: 189) as "the intentional capacity to identify and implement alternatives". Unlike in consensus theories, then, individuals and groups do not simply suffer anomie, which, according to Durkheim (1893) is what develops amongst individuals and groups when the underlying consensus breaks down because of social upheaval and inadequate socialisation. Instead, they are perceived as resisting, voicing protest. Pahl's (1968, 1975) work, for example, was stimulated by the urban protest movements in the late 1960s which he explained as a consequence of a sense of powerlessness, of alienation from and lack of influence in political processes.

In education, such alienation can lead to disaffection. However, disaffection itself can mean different behaviours and be interpreted in different ways. Earlier in this chapter, I explored its manifestations in poor behaviour, lack of motivation, and absenteeism. This can, of course, be interpreted as a form of deviant behaviour. Viewed as part of conflict theory, however, it can be seen as a form of resistance. Alpert's (1991) work usefully distinguishes between these two interpretations, referring to the conceptual perspectives of misbehaviour and resistance. For Alpert, misbehaviour is a perspective common to psychologically oriented studies of teaching and learning, and can be traced back to some 'problem' in the students themselves, such as preferring to socialise with their friends or not wishing to work. Such studies generally examine the issue from the point of view of the school, the teacher and the pupil, and fail to see the behaviour as a potentially legitimate form of participation in a democratic society. Resistance studies, on the other hand, view

such behaviour as "an ideological stand emanating from the perception of schooling as a reproduction process rather than an equalisation process" (Alpert, 1991: 351).

Resistance can, of course, also manifest itself in different ways. Willis's (1977) ethnographic study of a group of working class "lads", for example, reveals the existence of an informal opposition to the pressures of a class-based system, which takes the form of a counter-culture. Part of this culture involves "having a laff", a form of behaviour typical of male factory workers which Willis describes as arising from the boring and alienating nature of the work. Unfortunately, this behaviour means that the "lads" themselves unwittingly ensure that their opportunities are limited to working "on the shop floor" by failing at school. Thus, for Willis, working class pupils are not failed by the system as such, but rather fail themselves as a way of voicing their rejection of the middle class culture represented by the school. Unlike Hargreaves (1967), who sees the counter-school culture as a consequence of educational failure, Willis sees it as a cause.

The idea of an anti-school culture as a form of resistance has been taken up by others in school contexts, such as Corrigan (1979) who conducted ethnographic research in the North East of England. Corrigan's research supported his earlier claim that

> "...the evidence is that working class kids do, to a greater or lesser extent, resist something in the school system - how else explain the overwhelming evidence (that any teacher would confirm) that a school is a battleground, the pupils' weapons ranging from apathy through indiscipline to straight absence."

Many resistance theories and studies can, however, also be criticised for focusing on the macro-level. It could be argued that the immediate circumstances of the students, though forming the basis of rich ethnographic research, are too quickly distanced by the analysis. Mirón and Lauria (1998), for example, suggest that "such studies do not privilege student voice" (p. 190), whilst Herr and Anderson (1993) contend that "few researchers have systematically probed the subjective experience of school life as disclosed by the students themselves" (p. 2). This can then lead to new generalisations about groups, or even new forms of deficit, in which individuals who do not respond in particular ways are criticised (e.g. Brown, 1987).

Resistance theories thus need to be enriched by a commitment to the voices of the pupils, and by attempts to understand different pupil constructions of their world in ways which are accepting of difference and which privilege subjective experience. Willis avoided this because of his reluctance to offer individualistic accounts of failure, since this could imply that failure is due to 'family types' rather than the structure of society. Nevertheless, the failure to explain why some pupils do *not* reject school is a weakness in such work since it leads to an identification of pro- and anti-school culture with middle and working classes. Brown (1987) instead suggests that we need to look at what leads to different choices, thereby studying the complexity of meanings in the context of both structure and agency.

Listening to learners also can suggest alternative curriculum experiences. Based on her work with Y6-Y8 children in the UK who attend school but who are unable or

unwilling to participate in class, Collins (1996) emphasises that their passive behaviours result mainly from school processes, in particular the curriculum which often fails to match the pupils' lived experiences outside the school, and pupil-teacher relationships which can sometimes break down due to mutual misunderstandings of their respective behaviours. She proposes an alternative curriculum for these pupils, taking care to stress that this does not mean watering it down.

Collins's findings have resonance with the work of Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace (1996), which also analyses disaffection at a classroom level. Made all the more powerful by the fact that it is based on students' own perceptions of their experiences, Rudduck et al. (1996: 47-49) argue that disaffection is caused partly by a lack of "connectedness", a lack of awareness of where learning activities are heading, why they are being asked to do them, and how they relate to their lives outside school. Reinforcing this is the lack of curriculum coherence. Feelings of frustration as the young people are forced to trust that their teachers know what they are doing and to put themselves entirely in their hands are exacerbated as the student gets older and less willing to surrender control to someone else. Similar themes are taken up by Wallace (1996) in the same work in a chapter entitled "Engaging with Learning", which suggests that instrumental reasons for working, such as getting a job or passing an examination, are inadequate, since at best they lead to compliance rather than to engagement. Here Wallace again looks to the classroom, suggesting that there needs to be a move "beyond compliance" to an

"emotional involvement in schoolwork". Lack of engagement involves a lack of active participation in classroom processes, lack of "negotiative discussion" (Woods, 1993), lack of control of learning. As Elliott (1997) points out, such an analysis offers an explanation not only for disaffection as expressed by exclusion, truancy and classroom disruption, but also for underachievement.

The problem of lack of connection is, however, not necessarily only experienced by working-class and minority ethnic children, though most 'resistance' studies focus on non-elite groups involved in overt acts of resistance (Giroux, 1983a). Alpert's (1991) study in the USA, for example, reveals that upper-middle class high school students can also exert *subtle* resistance when the teaching approach used attributes superiority to academic school knowledge and promotes a recitation style of classroom interaction. The argument is that the school generally does not take into account adolescents' language and interests even though it goes along with upper-middle class academic aspirations. Alpert's recommendation is that there needs to be more room for personal expression and responsive classroom interaction. The recommendation may, however, have to be more radical for groups who are excluded or at risk of exclusion.

So where is the 'problem' located in these studies? Relating them to theories of consensus and conflict is not straightforward. On the one hand, they could be criticised for focusing on the specific, namely the school or even the classroom. As such they could be perceived as being fundamentally based on an idea of consensus,

suggesting that all would be well in society if schools were to address these issues. They could then be criticised for deflecting attention from the real inequalities of society, this time by 'blaming' not individual or group consumers, but educational establishments and pedagogical styles. On the other hand, it could be argued that they are based on conflict theories of power and control, interpreted as a manifestation of resistance to the imposition of one set of values (i.e. the education system's as represented by the teachers, the curriculum, the school structures etc) on another (the students'), as argued by Giroux (1983: 89-91). Furthermore, criticisms of inappropriate curriculum content could move the analysis even further towards the larger question of which forces control the curriculum.

What is clear from these studies is that many different influences, located at many different levels, are at play in our schools, and that there are many possible responses and forms of resistance to structural or subjective power relationships. A general rejection of consensus approaches to education, refusing to locate the problem in the individual, means, however, that we have moved away from deficit and deviance theories, and are considering the problem as it is located in broader social, political and economic contexts which will impact on and be reflected at the local and institutional level. In other words, disaffection is linked to some form of disenfranchisement which can be manifested in a number of ways, such as alienation or lack of connectedness. This is more than a conceptualisation of disaffection as a lack of engagement (e.g. Doherty, 1997; Rudduck et al., 1996). In different ways, the disenfranchisement experienced by certain pupils leads to a desire for agency, to

have their voices heard. Such agency may be expressed in different ways, actively or passively, in constructive or destructive ways. Whichever way it is expressed, however, it could suggest a reconceptualisation of disaffection as a *search for a voice in a context of disenfranchisement* as experienced either at the micro or at the macro level (Lamb, 2000b).

Such a reconceptualisation enables us to explore the context of disenfranchisement through the voices of the disaffected, positioning these voices as rational expressions of resistance. It also allows us to explore ways in which voices may be listened to in an educational context, and how they may as a result be construed as positive forms of resistance, changing circumstances for the better. This in turn allows us to locate the problem of negative forms of resistance in educational systems and structures which do not allow 'voice' to be expressed. This is echoed by Foucault who suggests that the important question to ask is not whether "a culture without constraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system" (Kritzman, 1988: 294).

This brief exploration of literature which has informed my research has also reassured me that transformation may be possible at least at the micro level of the school or classroom, even if it is more difficult to transform power structures at the macro level. Disaffection conceptualised and manifested as a form of rational behaviour can lead to change, unlike disaffection as it appears in deficit and

deviance theories (Schostak, 1991). I found an interesting parallel in Castells's (1983) analysis of urban social movements. Despite his affirmation that fundamental changes to society could only be brought about through revolution and the collapse of capitalism, he explored the possibilities for groups of making the most of their (admittedly limited) power on their own specific territory, (a theme which has been taken up by other urban sociologists such as Dickens (1990)). I would suggest that, in the absence of a macro-Utopia, the potential of local utopias in which human agency can bring about social, political and economic change should not be underestimated. This suggests that schools, teachers and pupils can create an environment where they themselves are empowered to make the most of what they have got through a form of assertive, positive resistance. Taken further, we can see the possibilities for students to learn the skills of negotiating their space, of *finding* a voice within the overall constraints of the system. In this way, I am suggesting that resistance can bring about change which will benefit the pupils and help them to make the most of their potential, rather than as something which leads to withdrawal, lack of influence, and failure. Underpinned by an awareness of the constraints, resistance becomes in Sarup's terms collective, 'emergent', organised and progressive, rather than individualistic and 'residual' (Sarup, 1991: 12).

1.7. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this brief review is to offer insights into their influences on my research. Linking back to my autobiographical reflection, it is clear that the literature has resonance with the questions I was posing myself with regard to

differing perspectives on the nature of achievement and disaffection. It also led to a number of commitments I wished to make with regard to my own research.

Firstly, I was determined to avoid locating the problem solely in the pupils and families. I needed to explore my questions with a view to finding out what may be happening to the pupils to bring about such a lack of motivation, to locate the sources of disenfranchisement and alienation. I also needed to find out the ways in which they were able to express their resistance, to find their voices.

Secondly, I was determined to avoid the assumption that life is homogeneous in urban schools, that everyone shares the same problems and attitudes, and that this 'life-form' is very different from the 'life-form' to be found in more thriving areas (and therefore amongst different socio-economic or ethnic groups). The need to understand so-called areas of disadvantage was identified by Nixon et al. (1996), who concluded that most education reforms of the first half of the 1990s failed to understand fully the needs of these areas, ("the experience of living and learning in such areas is taken for granted rather than explored" (p. 28)), leading to an insufficiently developed vision of education and theory of learning.

Thirdly, such commitments demand a rigorous and ethical research methodology. My reading reinforced the inadequacies of positivist approaches to research if the aim is to listen to voices, and led me to a commitment to some form of ethnographic research which adopts a hermeneutic approach to understanding

language learners' experiences. My research takes the position that the learners are the experts in voicing their own understandings of learning. Any analysis would thus also have to be grounded in the voices of the learners.

Finally, the literatures also connected with my interest in learner autonomy through concepts such as control, agency and voice. This was reinforced when I read publications relating to US work on the concept of *resilience*. Recognising the different ways in which people respond to risk, stress and adversity, Winfield (1991) produced a conceptual framework in which resilience is conceptualised in various ways, from a reactive to a proactive attribute. Rutter (1987), for example, suggests that it is not a fixed attribute but a response to a risk situation operating at critical moments in life, and that it can take the form of either 'vulnerability' or 'protective mechanisms' which modify the individual's response to the risk situation (Rutter, 1987). Wang (1997), on the other hand, defines it as a much more proactive and assertive attribute:

> "Resilient individuals are characterised in the literature for being proactively engaged in a variety of activities; having well-developed "self-systems", including a strong locus of control, high self-esteem, a clear sense of purpose, and healthy expectations; having the ability to successfully plan, change their environment, and alter their life circumstances; having strong interpersonal and problem-solving skills; and being capable of achieving learning success." (Wang, 1997: 263)

Reading this, I was struck by the way in which this resonated with both motivation theory and learner autonomy. I now needed to study the literature on motivation and autonomy in order to understand the relationships better. I would need to ask

questions of this literature which would enable me to consider its potential for offering a context in which disenfranchised pupils can find a voice in a way which does not reinforce social reproduction.

1.8. REFLECTIONS

The literature I have just reviewed is not the kind of literature which can leave the reader untouched. I believe that it is impossible to remain neutral in the face of such arguments and, this suggests that there is a strong possibility that it will influence research in an ideological way. I am aware that there is a danger that my research will be motivated by a desire to find some justification for critical interventions. However, it is my responsibility to monitor this, to reflect on the intersections where my research data meet my own convictions. Apart from this I can only be open about the orientation of my thinking. The literature in this chapter is not core to my research. It is not a review which is aimed at identifying gaps for me to address. I am not going to be looking at forms of critical pedagogy or manifestations of resistance in a direct sense (though I would hope in the later stages to gain some insights into these areas). The literature I have described may be tangential to my actual research but it is, I believe, essential to an understanding of my work which, in the long term, is designed to address my belief that the best people to determine what is appropriate for the socially excluded is, in fact, the socially excluded themselves. The literature played an important role in my development as an academic thinker. As such, it forms the background to my questions, to my research methodology, and to my analysis.

We have seen how work which can loosely be described as existing within the paradigm of critical theory has, in fact, shifted over the last few decades. Despite the goal of emancipation central to the work of these social scientists, critical theory has been heavy on theory but light on practice. Many of the early 'masters' have been criticised for focusing on specific areas, e.g. the arts (Adorno) or language and reason (Habermas), or on marginal groups (Marcuse), offering little to the everyday life of ordinary people (Gibson, 1986). Much of the theory has been 'grand theory', putting people into boxes according to their socio-economic status and failing to recognise the role of agency. Even where the possibility of resistance has been recognised and explored, it has largely focused on failure. This may have been my starting point too, as witnessed by my introductory chapters, but I have begun to recognise that we should also look for success stories to learn from. There are examples of people writing about alternative visions of education taking the spirit of critical theory as their starting points (e.g. Trueba, 1994), but such work is still, surprisingly, in its infancy. What is crucial, however, is that we find potential ways forward by listening to those who have often been ignored.

2. SEARCHING FOR WAYS FORWARD: MOTIVATION AND AUTONOMY

2.1. INTRODUCTION

When I began to engage with the ideas explored in Chapter One, I was still teaching languages in secondary schools. I was therefore intimately bound up with the context of language learning as described earlier. I was also working in an urban context with its rich diversity and noticeable inequalities. The experience was by no means a negative one; many pupils were successful language learners, many enjoyed learning languages, and teaching those who were less successful or less motivated was a rewarding challenge.

It is fair to say, however, that finding ways of motivating pupils was a major preoccupation. Throughout most of my time in schools, languages were optional from Year 9, and the number of children continuing with language study was as much an indicator of a successful department as were the examination results. Class sizes which appeared to grow each year, and pupil concentration levels which seemed to diminish (a perception rather than a reality, I am sure) made the situation more demanding. In addition, the context of mixed ability teaching which characterised most of my experience (and to which I was fully committed) became increasingly challenging, demanding new approaches to differentiation as well as to motivation.

In their research into differentiation in Scottish secondary schools, Simpson and Ure (1993) described three forms of differentiation which differed from

each other according to where the 'locus of differentiation' was. The first differentiates by placing pupils into learning groups according to their perceived abilities or characteristics. The second differentiates by allocating appropriate course materials to students. These approaches were found to be the most frequently used approaches, but were criticised for the passive role allocated to learners. The third approach, in which both learner and teacher access a wide range of learning resources on the basis of ongoing negotiations, was found to be the model favoured by pupils. Given this preference, as well as the potential within such a learning environment for responding flexibly to a range of different needs, this offers a way forward for language teachers.

The question which exercised me, however, was how could this be organised? How could the teacher provide a learning environment in which every pupil might be doing something different, or where pupils might be working alone, in pairs or groups according to the activity being undertaken? In the 1990s, I moved away from London to teach in Derbyshire, where I was charged with raising poor achievement levels in language learning. In order to do so, my department and I developed a system of independent, or 'flexible' learning which I have described elsewhere (Lamb, 1996, 1998), and which offered pupils the opportunity to make decisions about which learning objectives to focus on and which tasks to do in order to achieve these objectives, as well as to assess themselves. A large number of resources were made available, catering for a wide range of individual needs.

In many ways, this methodological change was successful. Over the years, pupils expressed a preference for working autonomously, motivation levels appeared to increase, and examination results improved considerably (Lamb, 1998). However, despite a slight increase in numbers continuing to study languages beyond the age of sixteen, they still did not compare favourably with other subjects. Furthermore, some learners remained unmotivated within this context. As a teacher, however, I was unable to conduct more in-depth research into this intervention. I remained ignorant of the ways in which different aspects of the process impacted on motivation and learning, and of how different learners perceived language learning and their role in it.

Moving into higher education, I determined to explore these issues further by investigating the relationships between motivation and learner autonomy, and began to look at the literature in these fields. This chapter describes some of the literature I found which formed the background to my research question. The chapter is split into two main parts: literature on motivation and literature on autonomy. Firstly, the focused review of motivation literature will explore the relationships between motivation and autonomy, both in generic literature and literature focusing on language learning. There will also be a focus on the contextual nature of motivation. Two reflective pieces will then follow to connect the literature to my ontological and epistemological positions as described in Chapter 1: the first analyses the literature from the perspective of consensus and conflict paradigms, exploring the concept of connectedness; the second offers a critical appraisal of research methodologies employed in motivation research.

The chapter then moves on to a parallel exploration of literature in the area of learner autonomy in language learning, firstly defining what this may mean, then exploring its connections with motivation, before moving on to reflections on autonomy and conflict. This section also makes the connection between self-management and self-regulation, whilst suggesting that fundamental to self-regulation is metacognitive knowledge and learner beliefs. Research methodologies are also critically appraised, and the importance of context in autonomy research is a recurrent theme.

The research in both motivation and autonomy reveals the importance of exploring forms of knowledge i.e. understanding not only perceptions and attitudes but also learners' knowledge and beliefs about what language learning is, what processes are involved in it, and what their role in these processes is or might be. In other words, the area of metacognition is revealed as central to both areas. The chapter will finish by showing that the literature review has enabled me to focus my research question further, whilst reinforcing my commitment to listening to the voices of learners in order to find out how language teaching may change. This paves the way to the next chapter in which I begin to describe my own research in school.

2.2. REFLECTIONS ON THE LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the earliest problems I faced was how to decide which literature was most relevant to my research. The nature of my academic and professional development had exposed me to a broad range of literature, and had made me

aware (and impatient) of the fact that there were parallel discussions going on in different fields (e.g. cognitive psychology, applied linguistics, sociology, politics, philosophy, urban education), which very rarely seemed to show any awareness of each other. Beveridge (1998: 102) has also raised this issue. In his reflections on how to improve the quality of educational research, he highlights his concern that there is little collaboration between researchers in the fields of educational studies and cognitive science, that education departments tend to have very little contact with departments of, for example, social policy and welfare, and that there is thus little synthesis with studies about, for example, poverty, homelessness, health, crime and racism. I was aware that my work to date had led me to see connections between work in different disciplines, which, rather than constituting a weakness, helped me to generate ideas.

A similar issue arises with regard to literature taken from different national contexts. My reading included research carried out in other countries. The USA, for example, with its strong tradition of research into urban education, motivation and applied linguistics, has produced much relevant literature. Given that there are also many developments in the field of learner autonomy both in Europe and in the Far East, much research relates to the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) rather than to the teaching of French, German, Spanish etc, which of course means that the issues are slightly different. Nevertheless, I decided that my approach would be to review this literature in order to avoid oversight of important work, using it to raise questions which could encourage a more critical approach to the UK literature

on modern languages. I simply needed to retain awareness of the context-specific nature of any research (including both the content and orientation of the research and the methodological philosophy which underpins much of it).

The production of the literature review has also not been a linear process. I did not carry out all of the reading before designing the research, nor did I always carry out systematic reviews in individual areas. I have explained how some of my earlier reading underpinned my research. This was, however, more in relation to particular research commitments than to the substantive part of the research. I was sometimes concerned about this, I must admit, and often expressed these concerns in my research journal. I was, however, consoled by the suggestion in Glaser's (1992) book on grounded theory that comprehensive reading should not be done *before* the research is carried out as it will influence the research too greatly; instead, Glaser suggests that literature which is not directly related should be read. I agree, and would expand this to suggest that previously read, indirectly related literature is even more likely to influence the research.

My reading was therefore a mixture of the systematic and serendipitous. Interestingly I found little attention paid to the literature review in publications on research methodology. Those focusing on the research process were more helpful, though they tended to include advice about rather than discussion of the literature review as part of a methodology. I must admit to some anxiety about this, wondering if there was some 'correct' way of going about it of which I was ignorant. I did eventually find Hart's (1998) publication helpful,

but more as reassurance that the review could be conducted in many different ways. Certainly I did not feel comfortable with the approach advocated by Hart; it was far too 'neat' and also appeared to me to leave the researcher at the mercy of library search engines.

Having offered some reflections on the process of carrying out a literature review, I shall now turn to the two main themes of my research: motivation and learner autonomy.

2.3. MOTIVATION THEORY AND RESEARCH

2.3.1. Introduction

The complexity of the field of motivation has been referred to by many authors. Chambers has compared it to a map of flightpaths converging on Heathrow airport, a "mass of strands interlinking to determine an individual's behaviour" (Chambers, 2001: 1), and Dörnyei (2001: 2) writes that "we can say without much risk of exaggeration that 'motivation' is one of the most elusive concepts in the whole domain of the social sciences". Exploring this literature, I realised that it consisted of many different orientations, research traditions and, indeed, disciplines. In addition, I was looking at studies in applied linguistics, and my specific context meant that I was aware of the need to look at issues relating to MFL teaching and learning in the UK, whilst not forgetting the urban education theory which had contributed to my understanding of disaffection.

I thus realised that I needed to be clear about which aspects of literature I was examining if it was to lead to any meaningful research question. Fortunately I had made a start with this in my study of urban theory, referring to disaffection as a 'search for a voice in a context of disenfranchisement', reflecting the focus away from deficit theories and incorporating the ideas of agency and autonomy. From this, the motivation I wished to investigate incorporated notions of voice and autonomy, and was located within a social context. This was not to disregard other definitions of motivation, simply to offer a focus for my own explorations.

Another issue was whether I was wishing to focus my research on motivation or demotivation, or indeed its extreme form, disaffection. Certainly Dörnyei makes a point of stating that demotivation in itself has been little researched (2001: 5). Indeed his definition of demotivation was a helpful one for my purposes as it is not just a lack of motivation, referring as it does to "those environmental stimuli and classroom events that cancel out even strong existing motivation in the students" (*ibid.*). In other words, the assumption is that without such stimuli and events, the learner would be motivated. What I wished to find out was what this motivation may consist of, and if it was connected to voice/autonomy. I therefore needed to understand the literature on motivation if I was to understand why pupils might be demotivated, as well as why my pupils had appeared more motivated in the flexible learning context.

The particular focus of this review is therefore on those aspects of motivation theory which shed light on its relationship to autonomy, and in particular those

which examine ways in which external factors, the learning context, may affect motivation positively or negatively. As such, it does not include early motivation theories, such as basic instincts (e.g. Freud, 1964), needs and drives to meet these needs (Maslow, 1954), or behaviourist habit formation (Skinner, 1953). Also, although aspects of cognitive psychology will necessarily be included, it must be recognised that it is being interpreted as 'social' motivation rather than 'personal' motivation, assuming that 'significant others' will impact on internal cognitive processes (Weiner, 1994). Following the initial section on general theory, I will visit aspects of theory specific to language learning, before moving on to research carried out in the UK. The review will finish with some reflections on the issue of relatedness and on research methodology.

2.3.2. Autonomy in motivation theory

Exploring motivation literature for links to autonomy, I chose not to define autonomy in any specific way. As a classroom teacher intrigued by the effect of encouraging learners to take control of their learning, I had an open mind as to what might be relevant theory.

I decided that several theories/aspects of theories may be relevant and useful to my research. Self-determination theory with its component concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, was the most obvious starting point, especially given that Deci et al. (1991) refer specifically to autonomy, though I will follow Vallerand's (1997) take on this in which he considered how the learning context affects perceptions of competence, performance and

relatedness, suggesting that if it supports these perceptions in positive ways, motivation will develop. After considering this, I shall then look at the idea of 'locus of control' followed by attribution theory in order to highlight ways in which they enabled me to develop my research more precisely. The review will then briefly consider other social theories of motivation, including Williams and Burden's (1997) social constructivist approach and motivation in sociocultural theory.

2.3.2.1. *Self-determination theory*

According to Deci and his colleagues, *all* individuals are assumed to have an intrinsic desire to learn (e.g. Deci and Ryan, 1991). This motivation is seen to be a response to certain innate drives or psychological needs, postulated by Deci et al. (1991) as the need for *competence, relatedness,* and *autonomy*:

> "Competence involves understanding how to attain various external and internal outcomes and being efficacious in performing the requisite actions; relatedness involves developing secure and satisfying connections with others in one's social milieu; and autonomy refers to being self-initiating and self-regulating of one's own actions." (Deci et al., 1991: 327)

It is suggested that these drives, which are undifferentiated in infants, are then translated into goals according to the environment (Deci and Porac, 1978). In other words, if a child is surrounded by people speaking a range of languages, s/he will possibly come to view language learning as a satisfying goal. As such, it could be argued that intrinsic motivation cannot develop into specific goals without a social context.

In this theoretical orientation there is a particularly close relationship between intrinsic motivation and the concept of autonomy (or self-determination). This understanding of autonomy is, however, quite specific. Deci (1980), for example, distinguishes self-determination from *will*, which is seen as "the capacity of the human organism to choose how to satisfy its needs" (ibid.: 26). For these authors, will is insufficient to stimulate motivation. It is the activation of this capacity which is a basic requirement for intrinsic motivation. This is what they call 'self-determination', "the process of utilizing one's will" (ibid.: 26). In other words, we are all able to make choices, but we also need to be allowed to. This distinction suggests that intrinsic motivation can be frustrated if a person is not allowed to be actively self-determining. One implication of this is that the process of learning autonomously through actively utilising one's will is at least just as crucial (and possibly even more crucial) to intrinsic motivation as the need to learn itself. Individuals need to feel that they are able to act on the world around them, making choices and determining their actions in ways which are appropriate given their own strengths and weaknesses and the constraints placed on them.

Furthermore, external control of such behaviour will affect intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1987) have summarised research into what exactly supports or curtails self-determination and intrinsic motivation, itemising such contextual features as rewards used as a control, threats, deadlines, evaluation, surveillance, limited choice, rewards and other forms of feedback. This latter feature is explored further by Deci and Ryan (1992) to include the way in which feedback on achievements is offered. Here it is not so much the question

of whether feedback is positive or negative, but whether it is seen to be controlling or facilitating learning progress. However, not much is known yet about what affects the learners' perceptions of feedback.

The idea of external control, then, appears to suggest broad contextual factors as well as factors more closely resembling external motivation. Of course, it needs to be recognised that, in reality, most children will not be driven towards education if teachers rely on intrinsic motivation alone. As van Lier points out:

> "Will students who are left to rely on interest alone ever progress from Nintendo to Shakespeare?" (van Lier, 1996: 115)

Teachers therefore attempt to encourage learning through the use of extrinsic motivation. This can mean the introduction of reward systems, such as merits, stickers and certificates, to offer incentives for learning. Van Lier, however, points to two possible problems with this. Firstly, there could be the temptation to reward where inappropriate in an attempt to boost self-esteem, underestimating the learners' ability to evaluate themselves and rendering the reward meaningless. Secondly, there is the possibility that the reward might actually undermine intrinsic motivation, an idea supported by much research evidence (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Kohn, 1991; Lepper, 1983; Sternberg, 1990). Lepper (1983), for example, gives 47 examples of studies which show that learners who were motivated before being offered an extrinsic reward actually become less motivated than before when the reward is removed, having become dependent on the external stimulation. This would suggest, therefore, that extrinsic rewards need to be handled carefully, and always with the long-term goal of developing intrinsic motivation. As Deci and Porac (1978: 159) claim, in order to lead to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic rewards need "to

increase people's sense of competence and self-determination", and therefore need to be 'informational' rather than 'controlling' (ibid.: 162).

It is worth referring briefly here to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) particular contribution to the understanding of intrinsic motivation, namely his concept of *flow*. According to this theory, intrinsic motivation is located in the present and connects past (needs) to future (goals), and it is also self-sustaining. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that intrinsic motivation emerges when there is a balance between skills and challenges (which is why he calls it *emergent motivation)*. There has to be a challenge, but the learner has to be able to cope with the challenge. 'Flow' is similar to enjoyment of the work for its own sake, what German psychologists call *Funktionslust* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 250). The implications are that it cannot be there without differentiated learning activities, and that empty praise designed to raise self-esteem is inadequate for sustaining intrinsic motivation. This links to the intrinsic need for competence which has been referred to above, and also to the flexible learning programme which enabled differentiation.

2.3.2.2. *Locus of control and attribution theory*

In an expansion of his social learning theory, Rotter (1966) included the notion of 'locus of control', a motivational belief about the extent to which behaviours influence events and where these behaviours are located. Those with external locus of control, he argued, believe that their actions have little impact on events. Conversely, those with internal locus of control believe that they have control over events. In Rotter's own words:

> "When a reinforcement is perceived by the subject as following some action of his own but not being entirely contingent upon his action, then, in our culture, it is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him. When the event is interpreted in this way by an individual, we have labelled this a belief in *external control.* If the person perceives that the event is contingent upon his own behaviour or his own relatively permanent characteristics, we have termed this a belief in *internal control.*" (p. 1)

This influenced a plethora of research studies, (e.g. Deci, 1975; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Findley and Cooper, 1983; Pintrich and Schunk, 1996), and there seems to be broad agreement that having a sense of control over what is happening (and, hence, a sense of personal responsibility) is a key factor in both initial and continuing motivation. Indeed, some of this research highlights a strong relationship (albeit a non-causal one) between internal locus of control and enhanced academic achievement (e.g. Findley and Cooper, 1983).

Related to this theory is the work of De Charms (1968, 1976, 1984) on locus of causality which illustrates another important feature of these theories, namely that locus of control/causality is not static, and can change or develop over time or between contexts, which means that it is susceptible to classroom practices. De Charms, for example, has developed programmes (Personal Causation Training) to help learners to develop what he calls 'origin beliefs' (as opposed to 'pawn beliefs'). Similar interventions have been reviewed by Wang (1983) who himself developed an Adaptive Learning Environment Model (ALEM) with a focus on offering opportunities for students to develop the skills of self-management. Williams and Burden (1987: 103) pick this up in their recommendations that language teachers should encourage learners to take

greater control of and responsibility for their learning. The implication of this is that the learning context can influence how much control an individual believes he or she has over his or her learning outcomes. This can be interpreted as meaning that individuals do not pathologically suffer from an inability to feel control over their learning, but that they are disempowered by their perceptions of classroom practices.

Closely related to this is attribution theory (e.g. Weiner, 1984), which is concerned with the ways in which students explain success or failure, and what they do as a result. Work which is related to this theory tends to analyse causal attributions for success or failure according to whether the cause is perceived to be *external* or *internal*, and whether it is considered to be *stable* (e.g. due to ability) or *unstable* e.g. due to effort). To summarise, such work considers it to be good for motivation if success is perceived to be due to internal, stable causes or if failure is put down to unstable causes. In other words, a learner will be more motivated if s/he views success as resulting from high ability (internal, stable) rather than luck (external, unstable), whereas failure will be easier to cope with if it is attributed to short-term illness (internal, unstable) rather than lack of ability (internal, stable). It is important to note that this is about ways in which individuals *perceive* the situation, and that this is not necessarily related to the reality of the situation, but I would suggest that the actual situation affects perceptions. Given that, like locus of control/causality, such attributions are situation-specific, we must recognise that the situation or context itself may need to change in order for the attribution to change.

2.3.2.3. *Reflections: locating the problem of disaffection*

As I have stated, it is important to recognise the significance of external factors on internal motivations and, in particular, on loss or lack of motivation. It is therefore necessary to clarify briefly my particular interpretation of the above theories in order to avoid locating the problem solely in the individual. By their very nature, cognitive theories, even those which recognise the social aspects of motivation, focus on individuals. Weiner's (1994) social motivation, for example, despite recognising that motivation is situated in a context, focuses on the individual's response to the context, which may not be positive. Similarly, De Charms's (1976, 1984) approach to the *development* of origin beliefs could be a deficit approach to the 'problem', enabling the individuals to function better within an unchanged context.

This orientation is understandable, given that motivation manifests itself in individuals. I would like to propose, however, that it is useful to explore the interrelationship between individual and context as a dynamic, focusing as much on the context's power over the individual as on the individual's response to the context. This links into the reconceptualisations proposed in Chapter One within contexts of conflicting interests and differential power structures, and suggests that change may need to occur in the context rather than or as well as in the individual. For the purposes of my study, I am interested in examining how external factors may empower or disempower learners, influencing their sense of agency and control, and, hence, motivation.

Interestingly, significant progress in this aspect of motivation theory has been made in relation to language learning. According to Williams and Burden's

(1997) social constructivist approach, all individuals will have their own ways of making sense of the influences around them and will make their own choices about why to act in certain ways, how to set goals, how much effort to make, and the strategies to be used to achieve these goals. Their approach, however, is characterised by its acknowledgement of the important influence of external factors on the internal factors which influence a decision to act (or motivation). These internal factors include sense of agency, self-concept, and attitudes towards others, as well as attributes such as personality and confidence. The external factors are complex and dynamic, interacting not only with the internal factors but also with other external factors. External factors include *significant others* (parents, teachers, peers), *the nature of interaction with significant others* (mediated learning experiences, feedback, rewards, praise, punishments, sanctions), *the learning environment* (comfort, resources, time, size of class and school, ethos), and *the broader context* (wider family networks, the local education system, conflicting interests, cultural norms, and societal expectations and attitudes) (Williams and Burden, 1997: 139-140). As such, they describe their approach as "cognitive and constructivist, socially contextualised and dynamically interactive." (ibid.: 137)

Important developments have also been made in this field by Ushioda (2003, 2004), working as part of a team whose work with secondary schools in Ireland is exploring the classroom dynamics which can encourage greater autonomy in the languages classroom. Ushioda's focus is specifically on the motivational dimension of sociocultural theory in which motivation is perceived as a socially-mediated process, and this promises to illuminate more clearly the

processes involved in the social-psychological interface, in terms of both cognition and motivation. The relevance of such explorations to my research is clear when we note Vygotsky's understanding of the impact of others on motivation and autonomy:

> "[Vygotsky] assumed that individuals have innate motivation for self-regulation and independent action, but that motivation to control specific situations and reach specific goals is acquired from others who transmit knowledge about which values and goals are approved by the culture. To a great extent the child learns what to want." (Bronson, 2000: 33, quoted in Ushioda, 2004)

Such work thus offers a way forward for the learning context to provide motivational scaffolding which can nurture the learner's sense of agency and, potentially, intrinsic motivation. It sheds further light on the relationships between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, as well as shifts in perceived locus of control and attribution theory. The ways in which such shifts may be influenced by the classroom context, and specifically the teacher, through a process of "co-regulation" leading to "self-regulation" (Ushioda, 2003: 99), are clearly complex and in need of continuing investigation.

2.3.3. Motivation in foreign language learning

The agenda for research into language learning motivation took a particular turn with the work of Gardner and Lambert (1972) in the specific context of Canada (see also Gardner, 1985; Gardner and McIntyre, 1992, 1993) (though there have been other contributions, such as Krashen's 'affective filter' (1982)). This social-psychological approach views motivation as one of the most significant factors in language learning, independent of ability, and suggests that this is largely because language learning involves motivational

dimensions which are qualitatively different from other types of learning. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), language learning does not only involve the learning of a subject (the language) but also requires a willingness "to identify with members of another ethnolinguistic group and to take on very subtle aspects of their behaviour, including their distinctive style of speech and their language" (ibid.: 135). Integrative motivation therefore reflects "a sincere and personal interest in the people and culture represented by the other group" (ibid.: 132).

This field of motivational theory also includes 'instrumental' motivation, "reflecting the practical value and advantages of learning a new language" (ibid.: 132) and relating to instrumental goals and purposes in language learning. Gardner and Lambert suggest, however, that this form of motivation is inferior to integrative motivation, as it will not lead to long-term, sustained motivation, though this is hotly contested (e.g. Crookes and Schmidt, 1991; Noels et al., 2000).

It is important to note that, according to Gardner (1985), these orientations do not represent motivation *per se*, but rather 'antecedents' to motivation which get motivation kick-started. Motivation itself is seen to have three components: *motivational intensity*, *desire to learn the language*, and *attitudes towards learning the language*. As one aspect of *individual difference variables* (others are intelligence, language aptitude, strategies, language attitudes and language anxiety), motivation forms part of Gardner's socio-educational model of language learning (Gardner and McIntyre, 1993). Here, Gardner and McIntyre

also include *language acquisition contexts* alongside *antecedent factors*, *individual difference variables* and *outcomes* as part of their model, highlighting the importance of this to any understanding of motivation.

This inclusion of context was an aspect of Gardner's work which was relevant to my research. (It later unexpectedly offered a useful tool for understanding ways in which the curriculum may or may not match such motivational orientations, though this only emerged during the analysis.) However, what I found missing was any of the general psychological research in which I had found autonomy playing a very important role. Interestingly, I then discovered the work of Crookes and Schmidt who, in 1991, produced an important paper which encouraged us to re-examine the direction which had been taken by research into motivation and languages. This paper called for a new research agenda into motivation and second language learning, which would draw lessons from general education theory and research into motivation in order to explore the specific language learning context. (In fact, Gardner later revised his theory in response to this by incorporating elements from expectancy-value and goal theories (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995).)

One of Crookes and Schmidt's criticisms was that the theory was based on an unclear definition of motivation, focusing on affect and attitudes:

> "Consequently, the term motivation has been used as "a general term - a dustbin - to include a number of possibly distinct concepts, each of which may have different origins and different effects and require different classroom treatment" (McDonough, 1981: 143)" (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991: 471)

They also criticised the work's lack of connection to classrooms, thus launching a paradigm shift in language learning motivation research which was taken forward by others (e.g. Dörnyei, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Oxford and Sheerin, 1994, 1996; Ushioda, 1994, 1996; Williams and Burden, 1997).

In order to address the shortcomings of the socio-psychological approach, Crookes and Schmidt identified four levels of motivation and motivated learning (*micro level*, *classroom level*, *syllabus/curriculum level*, and *extracurricular level*).

At the classroom level, they largely drew on Keller's (1983) four major determinants of motivation in education:

i) *Interest*, defined as a cognitive response, i.e. when curiosity is aroused and sustained

ii) *relevance*, which is seen to be a prerequisite for "sustained motivation [and] requires the learner to perceive that important personal needs are met by the learning situation" (Keller, 1983: 406). The most basic of these needs are those which Keller calls "instrumental needs", which are those *believed* by the learner to be required in order to learn, (though Keller limits this to adults), i.e. affiliation, achievement and power (in fact very similar to Deci et al.'s (1991) relatedness, competence and autonomy)

iii) *expectancy*, which draws on research (Deci, 1975; Keller, 1983; Pintrich, 1989) based on locus of control and attribution theory

iv) *outcomes*, extrinsic rather than intrinsic (Deci, 1975): reward or punishment

Clearly Crookes and Schmidt's research direction corresponded far more closely to the research context which I was about to investigate, in that it included both the social contexts (relevant to language learning in UK schools) and those aspects of psychological motivation theory which I had already identified as having links to autonomy, and confirmed that I would need to develop a holistic picture of the situation if I was to understand in more depth what had been happening in my classroom. The need to see motivation within a broad framework, including a range of psychological aspects as well as contextual features, has been developed further by Dörnyei (1994a) who conceptualised motivation at three levels: *language level*, *learner level*, and *learning situation level*. This framework highlights the complex nature of classroom-based motivation research. It has supported many other researchers in their analysis of motivational interventions (see, for example, Chambers, 2001). For me, it offered reassurance that it was possible to investigate the issues I wished to investigate, and locate them firmly in a very specific context, even if my commitment to an ethnographic approach meant that a different kind of framework may emerge.

2.3.3.1. *Foreign language learning motivation theory and autonomy*

The paradigm shift referred to above has led to some focused interest in the relationship between motivation and autonomy. Although this research is still "relatively new" (Dörnyei, 2001: 59), there does appear to be a relationship

(Dickinson, 1995; Lamb, 2004; Ushioda, 1996). This has been stated categorically by Dickinson (1995) and Ushioda (1996). According to Dickinson:

> "enhanced motivation is conditional on learners taking responsibility for their own learning...and perceiving that their learning successes and failures are to be attributed to their own efforts and strategies rather than to factors outside their control." (Dickinson, 1995: 173-174)

Ushioda (1996) states even more directly:

> "Autonomous language learners are by definition motivated learners." (Ushioda, 1996: 2)

The link is indeed so strongly made that Dörnyei's (1998) *Ten commandments for motivating language learners* includes *Promote learner autonomy* as its seventh commandment (ibid.: 217).

In order to understand this link, then, and following on from arguments made throughout this chapter and the previous one, there is a need to investigate how the context (e.g. classroom practices in specific educational settings) impacts on the ways in which learners perceive their ability to behave as autonomous individuals. In Dörnyei's *learning situation level*, we find, for example, teacher-specific components which include authority type (controlling vs. autonomy supporting). However, the impact of this on specific motivational beliefs relating to autonomy certainly needs further research.

For me, this was corroboration of my thesis which was to understand motivation (and demotivation/disaffection) within a broad contextual framework of potentially conflicting interests. It also suggested that the improvements in motivation and learning which accompanied my own

learners' increased opportunities to make choices about their learning had some theoretical basis. Furthermore, since every context is different (McGroarty, 1998), the need to carry out research into the specific experiences of learners in a UK secondary context was confirmed. By focussing further still on learners with experience of independent learning opportunities, I would be able to explore the motivational impact of different elements of autonomy more thoroughly.

Before embarking on such research, therefore, it is important to take a look at motivation research which has been carried out in the context of foreign language learning in the UK.

2.3.3.2. *Motivation studies in modern language learning in the UK*

Williams, Burden and Lanvert (2002) have commented that in the UK, "research in this field has tended to be more pragmatic in attempting to identify the influence of key factors such as gender, age, home background and teacher competence in the motivational process (Chambers, 1999)" (Williams et al., 2002: 507). Given the urgent need to address the issue in the UK context (described in Chapter 1), this is hardly surprising. It does not mean, however, that theoretical frameworks as described in earlier sections of this chapter have been ignored. Chambers's work has been strongly underpinned by theories such as Ajzen's (1988) Model of Planned Behaviour (Chambers, 1999) and Dörnyei's (1994a) framework for L2 motivation (Chambers, 2001).

I shall, however, not revisit the themes I have already discussed in the sections above. Instead I shall focus this section on the particular issues which have been raised over a number of studies. This will thus complement the theoretical underpinnings I have identified so far.

A major study of motivation in modern language learning in the UK was carried out by Chambers in four schools in Leeds and two schools in Kiel, Germany (Chambers, 1998, 1999). The study involved quantitative methods (questionnaire) with large numbers of learners, followed by qualitative interviews with 10% of the cohort surveyed. Of relevance to my own research was Chambers's commitment to 'getting inside pupils' heads', and his focus on pupils' perceptions of their language learning experience. Key findings include: loss of enthusiasm between the ages of 11 and 13, and then again between the ages of 13 and 15; learners' perception that the teacher is the most important factor in foreign language lessons; little experience of those learning activities which are most enjoyed (working with computers, project work); perception that languages are not useful, relevant or important.

Similar issues have been revealed in other research into motivation and foreign language learning in the UK. Williams et al.'s (2002) survey carried out by means of a questionnaire based on 16 motivational constructs as well as interviews, found a decrease in motivation between Y7 and Y9, greater motivation amongst girls, greater motivation to study German than French and limited autonomous learning strategies, including planning behaviour. O'Reilly Cavani (2001) highlighted a number of factors in her survey of 294 learners in

Glasgow: experiences of language learning are not intrinsically rewarding; learners are not interested in other languages or cultures; they see no material gain for themselves; they do not achieve as highly as they expect and have little confidence in their linguistic ability (ibid.: 38). Marshall's (2001) research into take-up of languages at Advanced level and beyond, found structural obstacles in the shape of limitations on choices in the curriculum, as well as high levels of ignorance about the relationship between language study and employability.

Lee, Buckland and Shaw's (1998) interviews with 62 Y9 learners in Barking and Dagenham focused on the attitudes of those learners of average ability and average motivation who can become 'invisible' in the classroom due to their lack of demands on the teacher's time. The results of the research were interesting. Probably because of the specific sample, the learners claimed to be no less positive about language learning than they were in Y7, and the vast majority (72%) were of the opinion that languages are useful (most of them giving vocational reasons). What was revelatory, however, was that they appeared to have little understanding of the nature and processes of language learning itself: they did not know what they were supposed to learn from activities or from the lesson as a whole; they did not understand what constitutes progress (in linguistic and learning terms) and as such were unable to define in anything other than broad terms what they had learnt. In short, this small-scale research seemed to be illustrating in the languages classroom many features of Rudduck's notion of lack of 'connectedness' (Rudduck et al., 1996: 47-49). Since this research was published, Williams et al.'s (2002) have also

identified an inability to speak about learning strategy use amongst the pupils involved in their research.

A number of studies have revealed other relevant aspects of learners' attitudes towards languages and their motivation, though not being focused specifically on motivation itself. Most early surveys focused on performance (DES/DENI/WO, 1985, 1986, 1987) and, (as part of the Oxford Project for Diversification of First Foreign Language Teaching (OXPROD)), learners' attitudes towards and relative difficulties with different languages (Filmer-Sankey, 1989, 1991). These tended to reveal a generally optimistic picture. Aplin's (1991) study into reasons why learners did not choose to continue their language study (pre-National Curriculum) suggested that learners found other subjects more useful for their future jobs. He also highlighted irrelevant activities and lack of opportunity for contact with the country of the target language as two of the contributory factors. Alison (2001), on the other hand, has found positive responses to language learning in a more vocational context, confirming the QCA's assertion that working with local businesses and the community "can encourage pupils to engage actively with the world of work and help them make connections between what they learn in the classroom and the world outside" (QCA, 1999). Brown (2001) found that both a disruptive Y8 class and a cooperative but unenthusiastic Y10 class gained from what she calls 'a more adult way of learning', involving a cross-curricular project approach which allowed the learners to work more independently of the teacher.

Other studies have focused on the difficulties of catering for individual needs, and have related this both to underachievement and lack of motivation. The issue suggested by these is that language lessons are largely inappropriate to many pupils. This includes not only inappropriateness in terms of level of difficulty, but also in terms of syllabus content, and the teaching and learning styles commonly encouraged in the classroom. Saunders (1998), for example, claims that the examinations themselves are too difficult for most pupils, whereas Milton and Meara's comparative study (1998) suggests that the syllabi are in fact not demanding enough compared with those in Germany and Greece, resulting in a lack of achievement amongst the more able pupils, and the less able hardly learning anything at all.

In terms of the content of language lessons, Clark and Trafford's (1995, 1996), and Barton's (1997, 2001) work focused on gender issues, with Clark and Trafford reporting that many learners find languages difficult and irrelevant, and Barton highlighting that boys' motivation decreases faster than girls' as they progress through the school and that boys find languages less relevant than girls (though there appeared to be links between ability and perceptions of relevance). Similar differences have been pointed out by Loulidi (1990) and Powell (1986). Other examples of research include Salters, Neil and Jarman's (1995) study which was highly critical of "the utilitarian and reductionist character" of the texts which reveal "no cultural or human values", and also suggests that the GCSE syllabus is "rooted in domesticity of the kind that would be more familiar to girls than to boys" (p. 26), thereby questioning its relevance to real life (though it might be argued that many girls would also find

this irrelevant and uninteresting too!). Harris (1992: 11) takes this further by suggesting that the syllabus is class-biased, only meeting the "tourist transactional needs of the typical middle-class family". She also suggests elsewhere (Harris, 1998), that the issue of relevance seems to be of particular importance to boys' underachievement, with boys more likely to misbehave than girls if faced with learning which they deem irrelevant. This is supported by Bugel and Brunk's research (1996), which found that boys in particular tend to understand foreign language texts better if they already have prior awareness of the topic, which of course will depend on their own individual interests.

Mismatch of teaching and learning styles also features in research into the problems associated with language learning in the UK. Alongside traditionally negative attitudes towards foreign languages thanks to the position of English as a world language, the particular demands of the teacher-intensive nature of modern language methodology on pupil concentration and application is raised as an issue (Place, 1997; Barton, 1997). This is also highlighted by a range of studies into differences in learning styles, strategies and attitudes (Barton and Downes, 2003; Clark and Trafford, 1996; Harris, 1998; Pritchard, 1987), many of which again focus on reasons for boys' underachievement, but which serve to make us aware of the significance of these differences for any pupil, male or female, who has a way of learning which differs from that which is appealed to in the traditional, teacher-centred classroom. There seems to be some amount of consensus in this research that more boys tend to want to be able to work more independently, to work things out for themselves and learn in ways which they consider to be more appropriate to them as individuals, but this does not

preclude girls from preferring to work in this way. Many pupils simply want to be able to work more autonomously, taking on more responsibility in the classroom.

2.3.3.3. *Links to autonomy*

There have been a number of studies, including some of the above, which have highlighted connections between motivation and autonomy in a more focused way. Some of them (Alison, 2001; Bress, 1993; Brown, 2001; Lamb, 1996, 1998, 2001; Lamb and Fisher, 1999) report on interventions in which increased autonomy appears to have contributed towards an improvement in motivation. Others have identified a lack of autonomy in the classroom (little independent learning or groupwork) as a contribution to demotivation (Chambers, 1998: 249; Chambers, 1999: 133-134; Williams and Burden, 2002: 524). There has, however, been little attempt to understand this relationship in more depth in this specific literature. I had, nevertheless, found indications that further research in this area could bear fruit. Lee et al.'s (1998) work revealed an apparent lack of awareness of the process of language learning. Without such awareness, it is difficult to imagine that learners can have a sense of independence or control, which, as I have suggested, may affect motivation levels, so it is important to research in more detail what conditions are conducive to the development of such awareness amongst different children, and whether certain elements of this are particularly important with regard to motivational beliefs. Similarly, after finding evidence of poor ability to discuss learning strategies or to plan work, Williams et al. had also called for further research into the development of cognitive and metacognitive strategies as well

as learners' ability to control the process of learning in order to "provide insights into ways to enable learners to see value in and take control of their learning in school" (Williams et al., 2002: 525).

This calls for motivation research which is different in focus from other motivation research in the UK. In addition to the kind of research which attempts to access perceptions and attitudes, there is a need to access learners' beliefs and knowledge about what language learning is, what processes are involved in it, and what their role in these processes is or might be. This connects sharply with my commitment to listening to the learners' voices and suggests the need for research into their own constructions of language learning.

Having begun with a broad definition of autonomy for the purposes of finding out how the motivation literature relates to it, it will be important to consider research within the field of learner autonomy in language learning, though with a focus on particular aspects which are of particular relevance to my research. Clearly this will include research into metacognition as it appears in this field. Before I move on to this, however, I would like to make some final reflections on the motivation literature, in particular how it relates to my commitment to the conflict paradigm, and how this relates to research methodologies.

2.3.3.4. *Reflections on consensus/conflict and the concept of connectedness*

Apart from those UK studies which focus on gender and the few which make comment about the class bias of the content of language lessons, there is little

in the literature which approaches differential levels of motivation from a conflict perspective. Of course this is a specific ideological shift based on a particular view of the world as discussed in Chapter 1, in which a critical reading of society affects perceptions of the issues. However, there is certainly clear evidence in the above work that things need to change; not only the learners but also the curriculum, the processes of teaching and learning, and, to a more limited extent, the attitudes of others towards the learners.

What is particularly striking is that much of the above research raises the issue of *relevance* as a consistent factor in motivation (or, more commonly in the UK studies, demotivation/disaffection). Relevance could be viewed as an aspect of extrinsic or instrumental motivation (Barton, 2001: 46). I would argue that it is an aspect of an expanded version of 'relatedness' (if something is relevant, we can relate to it) and, as such, is an important aspect of intrinsic motivation. Expanding the concept to include relatedness allows us to see how it is necessary to be able to relate to something in some way (enjoyment, personal contact, understanding the purpose of a task) in order to be intrinsically motivated. Relatedness in this sense is, however, broader than Deci et al.'s (1991) use of the term (where it refers more to relating to others), and is closer to an expanded definition of Rudduck et al.'s (1996) 'connectedness'.

Looking back over the motivation literature, we can see the importance of such relatedness. Learners need to see the point of what they are doing; they need to relate to it. Relatedness (in their understanding of the concept) was one of Deci et al.'s (1991) innate drives which are essential to intrinsic motivation.

Attribution theory suggests the ability (or lack of ability) to relate success to one's own efforts. To understand the goals of learning and to be able to set them implies that we are relating to the goals. If we believe that we are initiating our activity and then controlling it, we are relating to that activity. Understanding what we are doing, and why and how we are doing it means that we are relating. In specifically language learning motivation theory, having positive attitudes towards other countries and other people (integrative orientation) or learning for a specific purpose (instrumental orientation) mean that we are relating. With regard to resources, Stevick (1976: 102-107) posits *relevance*, *authenticity* and *satisfaction* as essential criteria for the selection of language teaching materials.

Of course the research carried out in the UK is generally into *perceptions* of relevance. It could be understood from this (viewed from within a consensus paradigm) that the perceptions need to be changed so that the learners find what they have been doing (which can remain unchanged) more relevant, since actually it *is* relevant. Expanding relevance to relatedness, it could be understood that the learners need to relate more to it, need to take more responsibility for what they are doing and, if they do not, it is either because they are unwilling or unable. On the other hand, from a conflict perspective, we could also ask the question: is language learning as it is organised in school really relevant to all learners? Will they have the opportunity to use it in their lives? Even during their time at school, many learners from less advantaged backgrounds will have little opportunity to visit the country where it is spoken, so how can they find it relevant? Will they have the chance to continue to study

and to access the kind of jobs where languages may be relevant? If not, what needs to change? Can the learners really change so that languages become relevant, without some wider economic change to reduce their financial disadvantage where that is a barrier? Can they begin to see the relevance of a curriculum which may largely contain references to experiences outside their own experience? How then can the language learning become more relevant? How can it relate or connect to the learners? If we ask these questions, we are indeed approaching the issue from a conflict perspective. And, if we are to redress the balance and listen to the voices of those who potentially are disadvantaged by the situation, there seems to be only one way forward: we need to ask the learners themselves!

2.3.4. Research methods: A critique

How, then, do we ask the learners? The field of motivation research, developing from the tradition of psychology, has tended in the main to stem from the positivist tradition and, as such, has tended to be researched using quantitative methodologies. Most of what we have learnt from the studies above, in general motivation as well as foreign language learning motivation, has emerged from such methodologies, though later studies have also been informed by qualitative data, mainly accessed through interviews. The quantitative research has undoubtedly contributed to our understanding of the nature and processes of motivation, despite its limitations (see, for example, Ushioda's (1996) critique of Gardner's model). However, as we have come to realise that the various factors interrelate in complex ways, and are influenced by external factors such as context, there has been an increasing realisation by

many researchers that we need to develop new approaches to inquiry (e.g. Van Lier, 1996). We have also learnt that different individuals will respond in different ways to the same stimuli, and that, even as individuals, they may not always respond in the same way, and this has added to the complex picture.

Dörnyei (2001: 57) has gone so far as to suggest that the "traditionally *quantitative nature*" of foreign language learning motivation research has contributed to the fact that there has been a relatively small amount of research in the field of attribution theory. Despite the fact that most of his own work falls within this tradition, he recognises that "the effects of causal attributions are complex, varying as a function of the type of attributions made and the attributional style and biases of the learners, and questionnaire-based studies focusing on linear relationships of broad categories have not been adequate to do this intricate process justice". This is not, however, only the case in attribution theory. He points out that generally speaking qualitative research accesses learners' perceptions more adequately as it avoids preconceived hypotheses and allows new understandings of relationships and influences in particular social contexts (ibid.: 193-194). The lack of data-based research "to account for the impact of the socio-cultural and political macrocontext on the classroom-based processes" is also drawn to our attention (ibid.: 107).

The complex nature of motivation means that we need to access learners' beliefs and understanding about what is happening in the learning context. Ames (1986) usefully distinguishes between two forms of general motivational research: that which defines motivation in terms of that which can be observed,

i.e. learners' actions and behaviour (amount of effort, perseverance, activity etc); and that which relates to learners' beliefs and patterns of thinking. Until recently, there has been little exploration of the latter in language learning research. In fact, the four research reviews into pupils' experiences and perspectives of the National Curriculum, carried out by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, have each highlighted the dearth of research into the pupils' perspective in modern languages education (Lord, 2001, 2002, 2003; Lord and Harland, 2000). There is also a recognition that, even where such research exists across the curriculum, much of it fails to offer direct insights into the pupils' voices:

> "what pupils actually say about what they would find more relevant or enjoy more and why can get overlooked in the research. The pupil's voice often needs extracting from the literature. Indeed, studies which directly seek and report the pupils' views make up only a portion of the research reviewed here" (Lord, 2003: 13)

In order to take this forward, I would suggest that quantitative instruments are inadequate and that we need to explore more pupil-friendly forms of qualitative research. Certainly I had been concerned that many of the instruments used in quantitative studies would be inaccessible to the kind of learners I had worked with.

An example of the use of qualitative methodology is the work of Allwright and Bailey (1991) in the UK. Drawing on Stevick (1976), they identified a form of integrative motivation which they referred to as 'receptivity', "a state of mind, whether permanent or temporary, that is open to the experience of becoming a speaker of another language" (p. 157). The opposite of receptivity for them is 'defensiveness', which results from the learner feeling threatened by the

language learning experience. In order to investigate this, they wished to gain deep insights from learners, and decided to use learner diaries. Their diary studies (involving adults learning English) have usefully highlighted why people are receptive or not (Bailey, 1980, 1983), uncovering factors such as anxiety and competitiveness, and the related issue of self-esteem.

In 1991, Crookes and Schmidt wrote:

> "From a conceptual point of view, much of the work on motivation in SL learning has not dealt with motivation at all. Consequently, we have adopted here a definition of motivation in terms of choice, engagement, and persistence, as determined by interest, relevance, expectancy, and outcomes. We suggest that this will allow the concept of motivation to continue to be linked with attitudes as a distal factor, while at the same time providing a more satisfactory connection to language-learning processes and language pedagogy." (Crookes and Schmidt, 1991: 502)

With this in mind, they called for new research methodologies, including the use of case study. Given my commitment to learning from the learners' voices about complex interrelationships (between motivation and autonomy) which are potentially in a state of constant flux, I would argue, along with Crookes and Schmidt (1991) and Ushioda (1996a: 240-241) that new methodological approaches are needed. This is reinforced by my understanding of social contexts as being complex and dynamic, as well as being located within a conflict paradigm where multiple levels of power relationships may also be coming into play, and where learners, potentially without voice, will be trying to find their voice.

2.4. LEARNER AUTONOMY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

2.4.1. Introduction

The literature on learner autonomy is also extensive, and a comprehensive discussion of the origins and uses of the concept would not be possible here. The following review, then, has a number of particular foci. Firstly, I shall offer a very brief overview of ways in which learner autonomy in language learning can be defined and how that impacts on its scope. I shall then complement my motivation review by exploring what this literature says about motivation. Inevitably there are overlaps here, with some authors straddling both fields. For this reason, it will not be an extensive review, but will simply add to the picture started above.

Building on this, I shall focus on those aspects of autonomy which relate most closely to my interest in and commitment to themes of voice and agency, themes which themselves are related to motivation as identified earlier in this thesis. The first involves a reflection on the nature of learner autonomy work in terms of consensus or conflict paradigms, offering insights into ways in which learners may have opportunities to 'find a voice', to take control of their learning. Recognising that the research indicates that learners need to have opportunities not only to control their learning, but also to develop their understanding of how to take control of their learning, the second aspect looks at the literature on metacognitive knowledge and learners' beliefs about language learning, in order to enable us to find appropriate ways of supporting our learners in finding their voice.

As with the review of motivation above, insights into appropriate research methodologies will be explored, and an eye will be kept on the situated nature of learner autonomy throughout. Again these reflect my own commitments as described at the end of Chapter One.

It is important to state that this review will not cover the highly contested issue of whether or not increased learner autonomy leads to better learning in the sense of higher achievement. Though this also appeared to be the case in my classroom, my focus here is on motivation. Suffice it to say that many of the issues are similar and that there is some evidence that learner autonomy improves learning outcomes (Dam and Legenhausen, 1996; Nunan, 1996; Stork, 2001; Wesche, 1979); however, there are also problems with making any claims (Crabbe, 1999a).

2.4.2. Defining learner autonomy in language learning

The literature reveals a number of overviews of the meaning and history of and research into autonomy in language learning (Benson, 2001, 2003; Benson and Voller, 1997; Dickinson, 1987; Gremmo and Riley 1995; Pemberton, 1996; Pennycook, 1997; Sinclair, 2000; Smith, 2002). Definitions of this term are problematic, as it manifests itself in multifarious ways, depending on which broad philosophical, ideological, political, social and educational influences are at play, what the purposes and principles are, and in which contexts it is found.

Close examination of the relevant literature, however, reveals two main traditions. The first, which I shall call *self-management*, emerged from

developments in *self-directed language learning* (which largely originated in language learning programmes situated outside the classroom) and relates to the overall process of learning and the learning environment (Dickinson, 1987, 1992; Holec, 1981). Here the aim is for learners to manage their own learning by planning what they wish to or need to achieve (both short- and long-term goals), making choices from a range of learning activities and resources about how they are going to achieve this, and monitoring and evaluating their progress. In this tradition, the teacher's role is largely taken over by the learner, with the teacher's role possibly becoming more of a facilitator of learning, helping the learner to cater for his/her own individual needs.

The second tradition of language learner autonomy, which I shall call *self-regulation*, reflects a form of autonomy which relates to awareness of the self as learner and is an internalised form of autonomy, emerging from general work in cognitive psychology (e.g. Dansereau, 1985; Weinstein, 1978). In this tradition, the aim is to enhance the processes and outcomes of learning through the identification of the successful *learning strategies* as well as the competences of the 'good language learner' (Chamot, 1987; Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1975, 1987, 1995; Rubin and Thompson, 1982; Stern, 1975). Drawing on research in general learning strategies, which had started to divide them into cognitive and metacognitive (e.g. Brown and Palincsar, 1982), this led to developments in metacognitive strategies in language learning, which aim to make learners become aware of their learning strategies as well as ways of planning, monitoring and evaluating their individual learning activities (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1991). Since learners

are thus encouraged to be more conscious of their learning, more reflective, the roles of teacher and learner will change in this tradition, though teachers may still maintain their control over the learning content or their position of authority through assumption of the role of 'strategy trainer'.

In order to distinguish between these two traditions, we could use the two terms *independence* and *autonomy*, which are often used interchangeably. Independent learning can be defined as a mode of learning in which the learner learns independently of the teacher in some way. This can range from learning which is entirely controlled by the learner, such as in self-access centres or 'teach yourself' language books, to learning where the content is specified by the teacher but learnt when and where the learner wishes, including at home. The focus here is on the *system* which makes it possible for learners to make decisions about their learning. However, there is more to independent learning than absence of the teacher, since the learner needs to be *able* to learn in this way, and this involves an aptitude as well as a willingness for learning independently. Someone who is both able and (at least some of the time) willing to learn independently could be called an autonomous learner. Little's (1991) classic definition of learner autonomy defines this further:

> "Essentially, autonomy is a *capacity* – for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning." (Little, 1991: 4)

The description of independence and autonomy reveals the overlap in the two traditions. It has been recognised, on the one hand, that learners working in self-management contexts (such as self-access centres) need to be competent

learners. One implication of this is that they need to become aware of how to improve their learning if they are to be able to work independently of the teacher (Dickinson, 1987; Dickinson and Carver, 1980). On the other hand, the metacognitive strategies of planning, monitoring and evaluating (what Wenden (1991) calls self-management strategies) can be extended from individual learning tasks and strategies to the entire learning process, bringing self-management into the classroom system. Firstly this happened in a partial way, e.g. focusing on self-monitoring and self-assessment (Dickinson, 1987; Weinstein and Rogers, 1985), then more comprehensively, with self-management becoming an organising principle of the foreign language classroom (Dam, 1990, 1994, 1995; Dam and Gabrielsen, 1988; Lamb, 1996). Though self-access centres can in some parts of the world be found in schools, such as in primary schools in Malaysia (Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, 1995) and secondary schools in Thailand (Ruechakel, 1996), the relevance for most schools in Europe is in finding ways of integrating some of the principles of self-access learning into the classroom. The UK 'flexible learning schemes' in modern languages classrooms (Gathercole, 1990; Lamb, 1996, 1998, 2003; Page, 1992) have their roots in such developments. However, on reflection, my own flexible learning classrooms were more about independence than autonomy, and, despite support with accessing the system, there was little systematic development of self-regulation.

There are, however, problems with the term *independence*. Benson (2001: 13) has described how the development of self-management in classrooms raised the issue that learners are not necessarily learning alone, without support and

interaction, and referred to work which suggests that autonomy implies *interdependence* (e.g. Kohonen, 1992). The social context of autonomy is similarly a major focus of the work of Little (1996, 2000) and the theme of negotiation is picked up by Dam (1995), who usefully reminds us that autonomy is not about individualism. As Murphey (2003: 6) succinctly puts it,: "We learn autonomy in groups".

This is defined more fully in the Bergen definition (Bergen 1990), quoted in Dam (1995: 1) and Dam and Legenhausen (2001: 66):

> "Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in cooperation with others, as a socially responsible person.
>
> An autonomous learner is an active participant in the social processes of learning, but also an active interpreter of new information in terms of what she/he already and uniquely knows. It is essential that an autonomous learner is stimulated to evolve an awareness of the aims and processes of learning and is capable of the critical reflection which syllabuses and curricula frequently require but traditional pedagogical measures rarely achieve."

This definition highlights the various dimensions of autonomy which have occurred in the previous definitions, namely self-management and self-regulation, independence and autonomy, individual needs and the social context of learning. Given such multidimensionality, as well as its relationship to other fields of research, such as learner-centredness (Nunan, 1988, 1996; Tudor, 1996), it is no wonder, then, that the literature on learner autonomy encompasses such diverse fields (Crabbe, 1999: 4), of which the following are merely a few. Focusing on the learner and on learning, for example, we find work on learning strategies, learner training and development (several

examples from the UK are Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Grenfell and Harris, 1993, 1994, 1998; Harris, 1997, 2002; Jones, 2001; Macaro, 2001), and these can cover areas as broad as the development of 'higher order skills' (Bertoldi, Kollar, and Ricard, 1988) and general study skills (Lewis and Reinders, 2003; Waters and Waters, 1992). Some literature focuses on autonomy as a way of catering for individual differences (Coyle 2003; Jiménez-Raya, 2003; Jiménez-Raya and Lamb, 2003; Lamb, 2003). Focusing on the teacher, we find work on the role of the teacher (Voller, 1997); relationships to teacher autonomy (Sinclair, McGrath and Lamb, 2000; Thavenius, 1999); implications for teacher education programmes (Lamb, 2000; O'Dell, 1997; Oxford, 1990; Vieira, 1999; Vieira et al., 2002; Wenden, 1991) and other aspects of teacher development (Breen and Mann 1997; Stewart 2003), including reflection and action research (Lamb and Simpson, 2003; Räsänen, 2001); also learner counselling/advising for self-access learning (Crabbe, Hoffman and Cotterall, 2001; Kelly, 1996; Mozzon-McPherson, 2001; Pemberton, Toogood and Lam, 2001; Riley, 1998; Voller, Martyn and Pickard, 1999). There has also been research into learner autonomy (and its validity) in different cultural contexts (Aoki, 1999; Aoki and Smith, 1999; Benson, 1996; Pierson, 1996) and insights into different representations of autonomy which such research offers (Dickinson, 1996; Little, 1999; Littlewood, 1996, 1999; Pennycook, 1997; Smith, 2002; Usuki, 2003). An interest in evaluating or assessing autonomy has also developed (Champagneet al. 2001; Dam, 2000; Dam and Legenhausen, 1996, 1999; Lai, 1999, 2001; Sinclair, 1999).

Given such complexity, it is impossible to arrive at a useful definitive definition. Despite having produced his own definition ('Autonomy can be broadly defined as the capacity to take control over one's own learning' (Benson, 2001: 2)), Benson admits that in order for it to include all possibilities, any definition is necessarily so broad that it can mean anything to anyone (Benson, 2003a: 278). This echoes Aoki's argument that there is 'no single authoritative definition of learner autonomy' (2003: 190), but rather multiple 'views'.

The point is that we need not feel constrained by definitions, but must remain sensitive and open to individual circumstances and contexts. The contextual nature of autonomy suggests that it can be construed in many different ways, and that we must follow the scent rather than look for the specific. What is important is that we must try to understand how elements of autonomy manifest themselves in individuals, bringing us back once again to the necessity to listen to our learners. This is reflected when Aoki quotes the following:

> "Fostering autonomy involves letting learners make choices. Letting learners make choices involves being responsive to each learner's history, concern, and aspiration (Webb & Blond, 1995)." (Aoki, 2003: 195)

The literature had already raised the question for me of how autonomous my learners had actually been as they worked independently, and whether deeper motivation might have followed further development of their understanding of how to work independently. I had now also found that my commitment to learners' voices resonated in this literature.

2.4.3. Autonomy and motivation

My examination of the motivation literature revealed theoretical explanations for the improvements in my own classes, and the language learning autonomy literature has supplemented this by suggesting how further improvements might have been made. In addition, both sets of literature had reinforced my commitment to finding out in a more systematic way what my learners had to say about their learning in their particular context. And my positioning in the conflict paradigm meant that I wished to consider ways in which the learning context needed to change in order for learners to find their voices.

An examination of the autonomy literature in order to ascertain any evidence of a relationship with motivation revealed once again two main orientations: those related to self-regulation and those related to self-management. Early work, mainly in the USA, was influenced by the general increase in interest in students' self-regulation of their own learning, and the development of learning strategies. The relationship between such strategy-based work and motivation is, however, problematic. Macaro, (2001) indicates a link between motivation and the use of strategies, but calls for longitudinal research into causality. It would be useful to be able to claim that increased strategy use leads to increased autonomy, but, as O'Malley and Chamot (1990: 219) point out:

> "With a classroom of unmotivated students, it seems too facile to indicate that if the students begin to use strategies they will become more motivated."

Simmons's (1996) research with university students in Australia also shows that strategy training does not guarantee an increase in motivation. Dickinson (1992) goes so far as to suggest that strategy training is geared more towards

motivated learners and will have little effect on motivation. There is evidence that motivated learners use more strategies (e.g. Oxford, 1990: 13), but this also needs to be explored further in different contexts.

Strategy research has, however, been broadened to include, for example, questions relating to the extent to which learners are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally proactive regulators of their own learning (Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons, 1992). Typologies have thus been developed by, for example, O'Malley et al. (1985), Rubin and Thompson (1982), and Oxford (1990), in which the cognitive and metacognitive strategies include affective and social strategies, e.g. strategies to develop use of 'mental control' (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990: 45) to build confidence and reduce anxiety, and strategies to elicit help and support from others.

Such research began to suggest that learners can take control of their attitudes and motivation rather than them being below consciousness. Learner training thus began to incorporate affect into its programmes. Ellis and Sinclair (1989), for example, encouraged learners to plot their changing motivation levels in order to rationalise them. Wenden (1991) included the development of positive attitudes towards learner autonomy as well as an action plan for changing beliefs and attitudes in her learner training programmes. Oxford (1990) included affective strategy training (including strategies for lowering anxiety, encouraging yourself, and taking your emotional temperature).

Ushioda (1996) enriches this cognitive approach to autonomy and motivation. The main thesis of her book is that we need to develop students' self-motivation:

> "Where autonomy implies being involved in and taking responsibility for one's learning in all its aspects, self-motivation implies taking charge of the affective dimension of that learning experience." (Ushioda, 1996: 1-2)

In doing so, Ushioda attempts to bring together the main preoccupations of teachers (how can we motivate our learners?) and those of second language acquisition researchers (what role does motivation play in language learning?) in the newly conceptualised question "How can we help learners to motivate themselves?" (Ushioda, 1996: 2).

Ushioda then offers a review of aspects of motivational literature, pushing this forward to offer a rationale and strategies for developing motivational thinking. Self-motivation is therefore, like autonomy, perceived as a *capacity* which can be sustained through:

- maintenance of a positive self-concept as language learner by focusing on successes and claiming responsibility for them (cf attribution theory)
- minimising the motivational impact of negative outcomes through sustaining an ego-defensive belief structure which would ensure that learners would not dwell on failure but would use reflection as a way of setting targets for improvement
- affirming motivational autonomy through locating the blame for lack of enjoyment on external circumstances (teacher, system, book, examinations) rather than on their own lack of motivation, and then

making the effort to do something that they enjoy, e.g. watching a film or reading a book

As such, Ushioda offers an optimistic view, though there is some recognition of the factors which will need to obtain for this to happen:

- Intrinsic motivation will have been engaged.
- This means that the work will have to relate to the learners.
- Evaluation systems will have been established which focus on success, specific skills, targets and performance criteria.
- Feedback is formative, positive, meaningful and genuine, with guidelines for future improvement.
- Constructive patterns of thinking are developed.

The proposal, therefore, partly involves a psychological approach to motivation in its requirement to develop new thinking. It does, however, also involve some external change, through the development of certain pedagogical structures and appropriate content, and thereby avoids a deficit approach. Nevertheless, most of the references do relate to university language learners and the question arises of whether there are the same grounds for optimism in secondary education. In secondary schools, learners do not have the same range of choices with regard to languages and courses; and teachers arguably operate under greater constraints in the form of a national curriculum. Here, then, the question shifts slightly but significantly towards finding ways of engaging intrinsic motivation in the first place as well as sustaining it.

With regard to the relationship between self-management and motivation, small-scale research suggests that there is an increase in motivation when learners have more control over the learning system (e.g. Smith (1996) in Japan, and Noest (1996) in Australia). Dickinson (1987: 29-33) suggests that self-management (which he calls 'self-instruction') leads to an increase in intrinsic motivation, and offers a number of reasons why learners experience this, including an enhanced awareness of needs and goals, increase in perceived relevance, power to adjust the course if necessary, involvement in decision making, greater sense of one's own importance, freedom to use preferred learning techniques, and greater levels of support from the teacher and other learners. Dickinson's work is informed by both cognitive approaches to motivation and to a commitment to self-management (also explored in Dickinson, 1995). However, such research is still at an early stage, and focuses largely on adult learners (Benson, 2001: 76). Although there are examples of interventions at school level which suggest that, for example, increased choice leads to greater motivation, these tend to lack a strong theoretical or empirical base, and offer little insight into *how* self-management may impact on motivation. (Lamb (1996) is typical of these, which is why he is writing this thesis).

In terms of the relationship between autonomy and motivation, a further question relates to which comes first; is motivation needed for autonomy to develop, or vice versa? Spratt, Humphreys and Chan's (2002) quantitative research amongst university students in Hong Kong suggested that motivation was needed for learners to be able to behave autonomously, whereas Harris and

Noyau's (1990) and my own (Lamb, 1996, 2001) secondary classroom interventions in England have suggested that increased autonomy can lead to increased motivation. However, given the complexities of both areas, it is more likely that a linear relationship cannot be claimed, and can certainly not be generalised between different contexts. This is a relatively new area of research amongst autonomy researchers, which needs further empirical exploration (Benson, 2001: 70).

In summary, then, it is clear that much remains to be done to investigate the relationships between autonomy and motivation even on a generic level. Ridley (2001), reporting on a project at Trinity College, Dublin, in which language teachers from local secondary schools were trying to develop more learner autonomy in their classrooms (described more fully in Little, Ridley and Ushioda, 2002), concludes by stating:

> "Finally, it makes sense that any explanation of autonomy should investigate learner motivation as well. We say that autonomous learners are bound to be motivated learners; therefore understanding the extent to which they seem to take responsibility for their learning requires an appraisal of the extent to which they are intrinsically motivated as well." (Ridley, 2001: 193)

2.4.4. Reflections on autonomy within a conflict paradigm

At this point, I felt it important to consider the autonomy literature in terms of the conflict paradigm described in Chapter One. Having reconceptualised disaffection as a *search for a voice in a context of disenfranchisement*, I now wished to consider the potential of learner autonomy to offer learners opportunities to find this voice. A number of researchers in the field have taken such a critical approach (e.g. Benson, 1996, 1997, 2000; Breen and Mann,

1997; Lamb, 2000; Littlejohn, 1997; Vieira, 2002). In particular, Benson's (1997) three versions of learner autonomy (technical, psychological and political) offered a useful starting point.

According to Benson, "In technical versions of autonomy, the concept is defined simply as the act of learning a language outside the framework of an educational institution and without the intervention of a teacher" (Benson, 1997: 19). It is a version which focuses on the learner's technical ability to learn by him/herself in terms of strategies, techniques and skills. It is rooted in a desire to improve language learning by offering an opportunity for greater differentiation, more effective learning and increased learning time.

Benson suggests that there are links between this conception of learner autonomy and positivist epistemologies and theories of learning. Language is something external and objective which the learner assimilates. The unquestioning motivation of the learner to learn the language is taken for granted, and therefore in this version of autonomy the function of the teacher is to carry out what Sheerin calls "learner training" (Sheerin, 1989: 34), i.e. a behaviourist approach in which successful learning strategies are taught and thus adopted. Little need is perceived for discussing why the learners should be learning this language in this way, the focus being primarily on how. As such I would broaden Benson's definition to include some forms of classroom learning, e.g. the curriculum guidelines for English in the German State of North Rhine-Westphalia emphasise learner training in this technical sense (Lamb, 1996).

I would suggest that although such a version of autonomy can improve learning efficiency considerably, it does not address the fundamental issue of conflict. It stems from a belief that technical improvements alone can enable all learners to learn, but fails to address the issues of disaffection and underachievement as interpreted above in any powerful way. Learners who do not relate to school because of a mismatch of interest and purpose may participate more actively, but the fundamental problem is not addressed. As such any improvement may be short-lived, with disaffection merely being postponed.

Benson's second version of autonomy, 'psychological' autonomy, moves beyond the technical version, suggesting that it is "a capacity - a construct of attitudes and abilities - which allows learners to take more responsibility for their own learning" (Benson, 1997: 19). Its focus is on the individual, resting on the principle that it is the right and the duty of each individual to develop him/herself. Preparation for this version of autonomy can correspond to what Sheerin calls "learner development" (Sheerin, 1989: 34), and is likely to involve the development of motivation which moves beyond the extrinsic and instrumental, since it aims at developing self-motivation.

Benson suggests parallels with constructivist theories of learning, in which the individual appears to become more powerful. The implication is that psychological autonomy can be seen as leading to self-empowerment within a context of equal opportunities. A conflict perspective, however, would suggest that such individualisation of the issues merely deflects the need for social

change. Viewed in this way, a focus on psychological autonomy is simply a (granted more sophisticated) call for remedial support. As such, is it likely to enable the disenfranchised urban youth to relate more to their learning. With so much left unsaid about the structural constraints on their opportunities, will they not once again feel anomie in a context in which the rhetoric implies that they should be able to succeed, and that if they cannot, they themselves are at fault?

Benson defines his third version of autonomy "in terms of control over the processes and content of learning". He goes on to say:

> "The main issue for political approaches is how to achieve the structural conditions that will allow learners to control both their own individual learning and the institutional context within which it takes place." (Benson, 1997: 19)

Quoting from Brookfield (1985: p. 10), he suggests that the teacher's task is to encourage students to "appreciate that they can act on their world individually or collectively and that they can transform it." For Benson, control over content is fundamental to such forms of autonomy, since it implies determination of learning goals. Without this, autonomy is considered to be 'an inauthentic form of autonomy – the ability to apply methods rather than the ability to control the overall direction of one's learning" (Benson, 2001: 103). Political autonomy requires changes on a structural level, since "paradoxically, learners who succeed in taking control of the content of their language learning may be rewarded by academic failure if their own goals depart from those explicit or implicit within the curriculum" (ibid.: 102). For some learners, this can mean a separation of school learning from real learning which, though not problematic for all (ibid: 102), can be for others.

Benson makes a connection between political autonomy and critical theory, which views knowledge as a social construction reflecting conflicting ideologies, and which views learning as the process of acquiring a 'voice' (a concept also put forward by Pennycook (1997)) and becoming aware of the power wielded by certain sections of society. As such, Benson is here offering a version of learner autonomy which potentially can encourage learners to recognise conflicts and constraints whilst ensuring that they learn what they want to learn. It reinforces the links between autonomy and agency or resistance (see also Breen and Mann, 1997; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2001).

I have suggested earlier that disaffection may stem from a lack of connectedness with curriculum content and processes, but that it reinforces the status quo and offers no possibility of what Sarup (1991) calls 'progressive' resistance, i.e. resistance which can lead to 'emancipation'. This needed further exploration at the level of the school, however, as it remained at a theoretical level. Such exploration would again benefit from the learners' voices.

2.4.5. Metacognitive knowledge and learner beliefs

In the review of motivation literature, I suggested that we need to access learners' beliefs and knowledge about language learning in order to understand how this relates to their motivation. In addition, the autonomy literature has suggested that in order for self-management to be successful, there is also the need for self-regulation; whether autonomy means control over the system or

the content of learning, there is a need for learners to have control over their cognitive processes. Such control requires the development of metacognitive knowledge (Dickinson, 1987; Holec, 1990, 1994; Jiménez Raya, 1998; Lai, 2001; Sinclair, 2000; Victori and Lockhart, 1995; Wenden, 1996, 1999a, 1999b, 2001). In order to focus my research, then, I need to examine this related field briefly.

Shuell (1986) defined two types of metacognitive processes involved in learning: those which regulate learning (e.g. planning, organising information, self-monitoring) and those which relate to what learners know or do not know about the material being learnt and the processes involved in learning. As such, the former are more like skills (of self-management and self-regulation) whereas the latter are about knowledge and, as such, include metacognitive knowledge defined by Flavell (1985) as knowledge about the self as learner (person knowledge), the tasks involved in learning (task knowledge) and the strategies which can be called into play in order for learning to take place (strategy knowledge). Various forms of knowledge are also identified by Wang and Palincsar (1989) as influential to learning: students' knowledge; students' ability to use what they know in their learning; and students' motivation. Students' knowledge is subdivided into: subject-matter knowledge and learning; domain-general knowledge and learning (i.e. metacognitive knowledge which includes knowledge of strategies for problem-solving and task completion, and an understanding of the interaction between one's own learning characteristics and the environment); task/learning environment knowledge; and strategic knowledge (the 'learning to learn' strategies). Ability

to use what they know includes knowledge about planning and self-monitoring. Motivation includes an attributional component suggesting the importance of knowledge about their ability to control their learning, about the way in which their efforts can lead to success, and about ways of learning positively from failure.

The specific contribution of metacognitive knowledge to learning has been identified by Weinstein and Meyer (1986). Defining metacognitive knowledge as "students' knowledge about their own cognitive processes and their ability to control these processes by organizing, monitoring and modifying them as a function of learning outcomes" (p. 323), they reported that pupils' understanding of material they have been learning is affected by their ability to monitor their own understanding, and then do something about it if they cannot understand.

Within the specific field of language learning, Wenden has made a major contribution. According to Wenden (1999b) metacognitive knowledge is one of three kinds of knowledge in second language acquisition (the others being domain knowledge, i.e. that which is specific to the subject of linguistic theory, and social knowledge, concerning the social distance between themselves and the target culture and, as such, related to social psychological theories of motivation).

Drawing on Flavell, Wenden (1999b: 435) identifies metacognitive knowledge as "the specialized portion of a learner's acquired knowledge base (Flavell,

1979) which consists of what learners know about learning, and to the extent a learner has made distinctions, language learning. It is a stable body of knowledge, though, of course, it may change over time." She goes on to offer the following properties of metacognitive knowledge:

- it is stable
- it is acquired unconsciously or consciously
- with cognitive maturity comes the ability to reflect on the learning process and develop new assumptions
- it can be brought to consciousness and talked about
- it is a system of related ideas

She reinforces this last property by stating:

> "Moreover, though their statements about language learning may sometimes appear arbitrary, in fact this knowledge consists of a system of related ideas, some accepted without question and others validated by their experience." (Wenden, 1999b: 436)

Wenden (1999b: 436) also reminds us that metacognitive knowledge is not the same as metacognitive strategies, since the former is knowledge acquired about learning, whereas the latter are skills through which the learners manage, direct, regulate and guide their learning. In fact it has been claimed that the development of metacognitive knowledge is more important to learning than attempting to teach strategies "because this knowledge can form the basis for selecting and activating one strategy over another" (Rubin, 1987: 19), (though strategy training has been by far the major focus of learner training (Wenden, 1996: 246)).

The literature identifies specific aspects of metacognitive knowledge relating to the overall purpose of language learning (Benson 1996), to the purpose (Sinclair, 1996; Wenden, 1995) and demands (Wenden, 1995) of specific tasks, to cognitive processes and self-regulation (Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Wenden, 2001), and to teacher and learner roles (Holec, 1981, 1990). Some researchers have focused on ways of developing and using metacognitive knowledge, e.g. through reflection facilitated by the use of learner diaries (Jiménez Raya, 1998).

Learner beliefs are often used as a synonym for metacognitive knowledge (e.g. Victori, 1999, 1999a). Flavell, however, sees them as a subset of metacognitive knowledge (1979, 1987). Yang (1999), on the other hand, views beliefs as encompassing metacognitive knowledge but proposes a broader theoretical construct to encompass motivational beliefs as defined by Garcia and Pintrich (1995), i.e. their beliefs about their ability to learn a language and expectations regarding level of difficult of the tasks, their goals and reasons for learning a language, and their emotional reactions to second language learning. Drawing on Alexander and Dochy (1995), Wenden describes beliefs as being held 'more tenaciously' than metacognitive knowledge, and also differing in that they are 'value related' (Wenden, 1999a, 1999b). Benson and Lor (1999) have attempted to refine the work on beliefs suggesting that existing conceptualisations do not reflect their complexity, and attempting to describe them not only in terms of their content but also in terms of their quality. Thus they distinguish between three categories: *conceptions*, higher order representations which "can be understood in terms of what a foreign language

is and of what the process of learning a foreign language *consists of*" (ibid.: 465), but which are not inherent in individuals since they reflect the context; *beliefs*, which are shaped by conceptions and represent what they hold true about the processes and objects of learning; and *approaches*, which describe the way in which beliefs are manifested in different contexts. More recently, Usuki (2003) has classified five categories of beliefs: affective; self-perceptional; self-motivational; cognitive; and social.

Wenden (1987) traced the early origins of research into learner beliefs in language learning, suggesting that it had been limited to an acknowledgement that they are important. She included references to research which suggests that good language learners have "insight into the nature of learning" (Omaggio, 1978: 2), and refers to "mini-theories" (Hosenfeld, 1978) and "assumptions" (Riley, 1980). Since then interest in the area has grown. Horwitz (1987, 1988), for example, has developed her use of the BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) to survey student beliefs, and other researchers have demonstrated how such beliefs influence aspects of language learning (Benson and Lor, 1999; Cotterall, 1995; Mori, 1999a, 1999b; Riley, 1996; Usuki, 2003). In 1999, a special issue of *System* was published devoted to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs in language learning (Wenden, 1999). This collection of research articles offered a wide range of categories of belief, though overall three variables emerge, namely the learning process, the learning task, and individual learner differences. In this volume, Cotterall (1999) also suggests that beliefs not only influence action but also shape attitudes.

Very recently there has been some limited research into the part played by the learning context in the development of language learning beliefs. Horwitz (1999), suggests that there is not yet enough evidence to claim that differences in language learning beliefs might be linked to differences in culture. However, she does claim that there are significant intra-group differences which she explains in terms of learning setting and individual characteristics. White (1999) also describes the influence of the learning context on what she calls 'learner expectations', in her study of how adult learners of Japanese and Spanish changed over a 12-week first experience of distance learning. Benson and Lor (1999) go so far as to say that language learning beliefs cannot be seen independently of the context as they are largely functional in a specific context of learning. This might imply that they will be determined by the context and will change if the context is changed.

What is clear from this literature is that there is still a great amount of work to be done to explore the nature and role of metacognitive knowledge and learner beliefs in language learning, particularly in specific contexts. Wenden (2001) has recently described metacognitive knowledge in second language acquisition as 'the neglected variable'. She has also proposed a research agenda for the future (Wenden, 1999) which includes the study of the role and development of, as well as differences in learner beliefs.

2.4.6. A word on research methodologies in autonomy research

I have offered a brief overview into the state of research into autonomy in language learning, albeit one which has adopted specific related foci. However,

this insight is sufficient to highlight a central paradox. The literature is characterised by two main orientations: one, which can be explained by its relatively recent history, is focused on theoretical and reflective writing, largely searching to define the field; the other is more practical in orientation, influenced largely by North American developments in the cognitive sciences, and including interventions and data-rich research. The paradox is that the former orientation would benefit from a "systematic analysis of data" (Benson, 2001: 182), but data of a different kind from that produced in the second orientation which tends to stem from positivist, psychological approaches according pre-eminence to established ways of learning which have been 'discovered' scientifically, by which learners are measured and to which they should be directed if they are to be 'good learners'. Learning strategies, for example, are seen to be non-context-specific, existing in their own right and not affected by the content of the learning. The ambition of much of this research is to produce increasingly refined lists of discrete strategies in order to capture the complexity of the processes, yet contextual factors render these processes so complex that most taxonomies can be criticised in some way for omission or inconsistency (Grenfell and Harris, 1998). Furthermore, the desire to access large samples cost-effectively leads many researchers in this field to use structured instruments such as questionnaires (with questions involving Likert scales, ranking and multiple-choice) (Ellis, 1999; Victori, 1999a).

There have been a number of calls for alternative methodologies in very recent years. In the generic field, Nicholls (1992) put out a call for an exploration of research methods, examining different instruments for reliability and validity,

and further exploring qualitative methods e.g. case studies, oral histories, longitudinal studies. He also suggested that there is a need for research which involves fewer subjects but which is more in-depth, yielding richer data, if we are really to explore the complexities of students' perceptions in different learning contexts.

In the language learning literature, this need is also being expressed as the field matures. Riley (1996) has called for mixed methods in self-access research, and has used anthropological/ethnographic methods including, for example, the use of metaphor to analyse learner beliefs (see also Ellis (1999, 2001) and Oxford (2001) for other examples of use of metaphor). Chamot (2001) suggests that research into learning strategies needs to be more context-specific. At the 1999 AILA World Congress in Tokyo, the Scientific Commission on Learner Autonomy in Language Learning called for new research methodologies, and this has been taken up in a number of conferences and symposia around the world. We have seen an increase in the use of qualitative interviews, self-reports, and learner diaries, analysed in a 'grounded' way rather then according to existing taxonomies (e.g. Barfield and Nix, 2003; Usuki, 2003). The use of biography, autobiography and other forms of narrative inquiry is also being explored (e.g. Aoki, 2003; Benson and Nunan, 2002). Lim (2002) is one example of autobiographical research into one Korean learner of English, focusing on the interaction of perceptions, motivation and context. Dam has recognised that some of her earlier more quantitative research could not "answer many questions as to the specificity of the learning processes and

strategies" (Dam and Legenhausen, 2001: 65), and has introduced the use of ethnographic case studies (e.g. Dam, 1999; Dam and Legenhausen, 2001).

According to Little et al. (2002: 147),

> "...when it comes to creating and managing a learning community whose purpose is to promote the autonomy of its members, each teacher must find her own way, and each class she teaches, comprising as it does a unique collection of unique individuals, will present her with a different dynamic."

Research methodologies are developing in order to offer greater insights into learners' and teachers' experiences of autonomy, but given the 'situated' nature of autonomy (Murphey, 2003), further interpretive research is needed.

2.5. Concluding remarks: making a contribution to the research fields

To summarise, I have identified two related areas which are problematic given the research commitments I identified at the end of chapter 1, and these are common to both motivation and learner autonomy research. The first is conceptual, and concerns the imposition of objectivised forms of knowledge and beliefs onto the research subject, through use of pre-existing taxonomies (though, as I have shown, there are some exceptions to this). The second, which is understandably related to the first, is methodological, a problematic area given the elusive nature of both motivation and autonomy. Building on and echoing Cooper and McIntyre (1996), my intention was to explore the knowledge and beliefs which pupils themselves draw on in their day-to-day language learning, knowledge and beliefs which are not generally made explicit by learners and of which they may not always be conscious. I wanted to find out how learners themselves construe language learning. As far as

possible, with a commitment to learners' voices being heard, I wanted to find out how they describe their own learning processes rather than subject them to a battery of questionnaire items. Having encouraged learners to describe (and evaluate) the processes of language teaching and learning which fall within their experience, I would hope to draw tentative conclusions about how the languages diet can be made more digestible to them in their particular context.

This chapter therefore made me realise how much of the literature is still based on constructions of learning (a concept which will be explored further in the next chapter) which seem distant from the learners. They are distanced by research methods which atomise learning, by pre-constructed theoretical frameworks, by research instruments which largely focus on measurement according to an already existing scale. I wanted to re-connect the research with the human beings involved, listening to their voices.

My research commitments expressed at the end of Chapter 1 are thus echoed and extended:

1. The motivation and learner autonomy literature suggested that my intention to explore the relationships between the two had a theoretical basis, was relevant and could constitute an original contribution to knowledge. My focus on learners' voices led me to focus this research on the learners' own constructions of learning. Such constructions could for the moment be broadly interpreted to combine the British tradition of exploring affective responses to schooling and language learning specifically with research into metacognitive knowledge and beliefs about language learning, as well as motivational beliefs.

However, the precise formulation of this question would have to wait until completion of the first exploratory phase of my research, as I wished to avoid as far as possible established assumptions about the nature of such constructions.

2. The importance of context in understanding both motivation and autonomy meant that the learners' constructions had to be understood within the context in which they existed and had developed. The specific context in which I would research was one in which research of this nature had not been conducted, namely amongst modern language learners in an urban secondary school in England. For this reason, I have had to include literature from different contexts, with learners of a range of languages, and of different age groups. Had I restricted my review to UK work in this area (or indeed to international work with children), it would have been very limited and unhelpful.

3. My commitment to learners' voices presented methodological challenges. Furthermore, my research was not 'disinterested', which would entail viewing the learners' constructions of learning merely as interesting phenomena, but similar in intention to McLaughlin and Tierney's (1993) research committed to 'naming silenced lives'. Through a series of autobiographies, they showed how educational institutions can marginalise and silence different groups (they include, amongst others, native Americans, gay men, fired university lecturers, and black teachers), but they also showed how research itself can be conceptualised as an act of resistance, thereby challenging the traditional disinterested nature of the researcher. My intention was to encourage the learners' voices, including the ways in which they resist their language learning

diet, and to use this to challenge existing structures of language teaching and learning and make a difference for the learners. The design of the research had to reflect this. It is to this that I turn in the next chapter, which describes the first exploratory phrase of my research and the formulation of a precise research question.

3. RESEARCH PHASE ONE: IDENTIFYING THE FOCUS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous reading was not done in a vacuum. Although the review connects my own broad question to existing theory and research, the reading did not entirely predate the fieldwork. Whilst searching in the literature for a meaningful focus which was also consistent with my research commitments, a parallel search was going on in my research school.

This chapter will document Phase One of the research during which this search took place. Beginning with methodological considerations, the chapter describes how the first phase draws on ethnography in several ways. Phase One is described as a prequel to the main research phase, designed with three functions in mind: firstly, it provides the context of the main study which I have consistently shown to be essential to my research; secondly, it demonstrates the way in which the focus of my research became clearer in parallel with the focus I identified from the literature; thirdly, it reveals how I identified appropriate methods for researching the questions which eventually emerged (or, at least at this stage, what were *not* appropriate methods). After a description of the research design, the analysis limits itself to consideration of these three functions.

3.2. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.2.1. Ontological and epistemological assumptions

In the earlier chapters of this thesis I have described what I have called research 'commitments'. To recap, these have included the following:

a. Commitment to rejecting deficit theories which locate the 'problem' in the individual or group rather than in external factors;
b. Commitment to understanding the ways in which the languages curriculum may be adjusted to connect with individuals and groups;
c. Commitment to listening to the voices of the individuals and groups in order to understand the different ways in which they construe the world in their own particular contexts.

These commitments in fact reflect particular ontological and epistemological assumptions which form the basis of the development of my research methodology. However, the commitments first arose from my own autobiographical reflections and my reading in the area of urban education, rather then philosophical study *per se*. It was only later that I realised that the nature of these commitments corresponded to that aspect of my thesis in which we expound our research philosophy, considering the nature of truth and reality as well as knowledge. For this reason, I shall simply relate my commitments to the philosophical concepts as a brief introduction to my research.

Firstly, my exploration of consensus and conflict paradigms is an ontological issue. In other words, the philosophical position which underpins my research has

been triggered by my assumption that reality cannot exist independently of human beliefs and perceptions, which means that there are different ways of perceiving it. In turn, such beliefs and perceptions are socially constructed (e.g. Cicourel, 1973; Garfinkel, 1967), which leads to the epistemological assumption that knowledge is soft and subjective. The ways in which a child learns languages, for example, may involve electrical charges within the brain, but other factors contribute to learning; language learning is not a purely objective phenomenon which exists independently of the individual learner or of the context in which the learning is taking place. Similarly, the way in which education is manifested will depend on a variety of social, cultural, political and economic factors which make up the context of the system. This context will then, in turn, influence the way in which individuals construe such concepts as 'learning', which will then influence the ways in which they learn. And the way we try to understand these phenomena is through a process of exploration rather then through discovery. In short, I am assuming that such phenomena cannot represent a 'truth' which is waiting to be discovered. On the contrary, in common with 'anti-realists' (Hart, 1998: 85) and postmodernists, I believe that such phenomena are 'constructions' which reflect multiple understandings of reality, indeed, multiple realities, "each separate and based on different assumptions for understanding" (ibid: 85).

The nature of truth and knowledge has been problematised in different ways by phenomenologists, ethnomethodologists, critical theorists, poststructuralists, and postmodernists. Another element of my ontological position, which accounts for my commitment to the conflict paradigm, relates to my references to power,

disenfranchisement, agency and voice, and my assumption that these will affect the nature of truth. In other words, the truth that I am seeking is the truth that is the experience and thought of a particular group of language learners, that is affected by the power systems and structures which have formed the context of their lives, but that is also modulated by the ways in which they resist it. As such, there are, as I have already stated in Chapter One, close links with critical theory, which investigates the ways in which education is related to social situations, and the ways in which such relationships are permeated by the influence of power, leading to accommodation or resistance.

For some time, I was preoccupied with finding my 'niche', and was particularly anxious to locate my research within a specific tradition. Writing in my research journal, I was at this time mainly exercised by a fundamental question: how could I reconcile my position with regards to power relations and conflict of interests, to my ontological position which assumes that there are multiple realities and truths dependent on where one is standing? In other words, was there not a fundamental conflict between my application of critical theory and my questioning of the enlightenment movement? I have written that I am not disinterested, that I have a position of commitment to improvement. Surely, however, postmodernism can only end in a relativism which denies the taking up of a position, and which is pessimistic about improvement?

An approach to this dilemma is offered by Griffiths (1998) who suggests that in fact there is no need to assume that the two movements are antithetical. She goes

on to suggest that they are closer than they appear to be at first glance, and that it is only their complexity which leads us to come to simplistic conclusions about their positions. The enlightenment can, in fact, be seen as being about "constructing critique *using* reason, which, logically but paradoxically, includes the critique *of* reason *by* reason" (ibid: 305) - a position which is not too remote from postmodernism (which, after all, has its roots in the critical tradition). This allows for a striving for improvement which can take the form of a range of different values. There is no one answer. In addition, postmodernism can also include a form of optimism, albeit one which is not about "overall and continuing improvement in a system as a whole - the ideals of rational-scientific improvement. Rather it is an optimism that it is worth struggling for justice, knowledge and understanding, while accepting that there will be no final victory" (ibid: 305).

The concept of struggle is fundamental to my position, interpreted as a search for a voice. I have already discussed this struggle in terms such as 'resistance' and 'political' and 'critical' autonomy. Griffiths's reference to struggle as a process is indeed echoed in philosophical debates about autonomy, and the relative importance of autonomy as a process ('autonomy for language learning') and autonomy as a goal ('language learning for autonomy') (Benson and Voller, 1997a: 2). My hope that learners might develop a critical autonomy to enable them to struggle positively rather than negatively, finding the spaces in which they can act, stems from critical theory, and has also been heralded by Foucault:

> "My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper-and pessimistic activism." (Foucault, 1984: 343)

In Chapter One, I suggested that struggle could take place locally. My position recognises that power permeates all levels of education, hence my interest in learner autonomy and its potential to enable voices to be found in the classroom and, possibly, beyond. This position is also similar to several postmodernist currents which speak of the decentered, fragmented nature of power in contemporary societies (Torres, 1995, 1999). As Torres (1999: 103) points out, this is also a threat to a political sociology of education which deals with 'grand narratives' such as hegemony and its impact at the level of class, gender and ethnicity (e.g. McCarthy and Apple, 1988). I would argue, however, that local manifestations of power will have connections to the bigger picture (e.g. pedagogy as influenced by national curriculum), as the micro and the macro contexts are intertwined (cf Saunders's (1981) notion of the 'receding locus of power'). Power, itself both a source and a product of the struggle between change and the status quo, is itself a subjective phenomenon, but one which is connected to a grand narrative to a greater or lesser extent.

I have suggested earlier that my ontological and epistemological assumptions led me to a rejection of positivism as an adequate way of investigating social phenomena. My research methodology is therefore rooted in these assumptions (Cohen and Manion, 1994: 7). It questions the nature of truth and therefore,

following Bertrand Russell (1948), adopts a broader interpretation of what constitutes data than that which is sought after by traditional scientific methods. It also sees the need to question existing authority since it has achieved legitimacy on the basis of power rather than any inherent truth. In the same way that postmodernism "questions the *content* of rules and the legitimacy of those who *make* the rules in every aspect of modern life" (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 27), I wish to question the experience of language learning, the curriculum, by attempting to view it from a different angle. This calls for interpretive research methods, attempting to understand perspectives from the inside. It also calls for an exploration of the ways in which these perspectives are affected by the context in which they have developed. As LeCompte and Preissle (ibid.) describe, postmodernism (and poststructuralism) calls for

> "giving voice to viewpoints and persons who hitherto have been marginal or silenced. [Postmodernism and poststructuralism] ask questions which have never before been formulated and try to address them with unconventional methods. They interpret their results through new lenses and present them in novel ways which are intended to portray more adequately the multiplicity of viewpoints now recognized to constitute the reality of any social setting."

Though I am not claiming to be 'doing' what may be more usually recognised as postmodernist research, my commitments lead me to a similar basis for my methodology.

3.2.2. Looking for a methodology

The early days of my research were also spent worrying about finding a methodology which existed and into which my philosophical and socio-political

baggage could fit comfortably. Eventually I realised that this was not going to be the case, that in fact I was looking for appropriate ways of researching my questions, which would inevitably draw on existing research experience but would by no means replicate any methodology in its entirety.

I started off by looking at ways in which questions had been researched given my philosophical position. Inevitably, my commitment to voices on the micro-level initially led me to phenomenology as a philosophy which is concerned with the "indivisible interplay between knower and known" (Tomlinson, 1989: 156), thereby stressing the importance of the individual perspective. However, much as I desired to ""see" things as they present themselves in our experiences and to "describe" them in their own terms" (Priebe, 1993: 50, quoted in Anderson, 1998: 122), I was not satisfied that this would offer insights into how such perceptions are shaped by the context. To a certain extent, this is addressed in ethnomethodology, which can be viewed as a sociological application of phenomenology, committed to understanding the nature of society from a range of perspectives. However, this also seemed inadequate as a way of understanding the struggles for power within both the micro- and macro-contexts. Cohen and Manion (1994: 35) make a similar point when they highlight Bernstein's (1974) criticism of both phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists:

> "The ability of certain individuals, groups, classes, and authorities to persuade others to accept their definitions of situations demonstrates that while – as ethnomethodologists insist – social structure is a consequence of the ways in which we perceive social relations, it is clearly more than this. Conceiving of social structure as external to ourselves helps us to take its self-evident effects upon

> our daily lives into our understanding of the social behaviour going on about us."

This did not mean, however, that I rejected these two interpretive approaches out of hand. I believed that my own research commitments shared fundamental aspects of these, but that I needed to include a more critical dimension in my analysis.

As I re-read some of the urban education literature, I also became obsessed with the question of whether or not I was 'doing' ethnography? According to LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 3), ethnographical studies elicit phenomenological data, meaning that they "represent the world view of the participants being investigated, and participant constructs are used to structure the research". It also has its roots in anthropology and thus, in educational settings, is closely related to educational anthropology in its methods and orientation. LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 10-14) offer an overview of the contribution made by educational anthropology revealing how, from an initial focus on general areas and large populations in the 1950s, it started, in the 1960s and 1970s, to focus more specifically on studies of culture in urban areas, examining, for example, subcultures and minority ethnic groups, thus linking in with the New Sociology of Education (Apple, 1987; Young, 1971). Although ethnographers can be 'interpretivists' without being critical theorists, with such a 'history' ethnography did appear to be appropriate for investigating the kind of questions I had raised.

Ontologically and epistemologically, ethnography could also be justified as a methodology. Van Lier (1988) has, however, presented two views of ethnography,

the 'weak' view and the 'strong' view. The weak view, which according to Van Lier was prevalent in the field of applied linguistics at that time, sees ethnography as providing weaker data than quantitative methods, best used for forming hypotheses or collecting data which can subsequently be tested by quantitative methods. The strong view is one to which I (and Van Lier) subscribe, as it views ethnography as a valid research paradigm in its own right.

However, I was still concerned that most ethnographic studies seemed to be investigating questions which were less specific than those which I had formulated (e.g. Willis, 1977). The approaches adopted seemed to be inappropriate to my own questions since I was focusing specifically on language learning in a particular context, even though my focus was informed by a broader sociological awareness. LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 8) remind us, however, that there are many forms of ethnography, varying in scope, focus and methods, since traditional studies, which examine a site in its entirety, have been supplemented by 'microethnographies' which focus on smaller areas within the large socio-cultural system, such as a single classroom, possibly using methods previously not used in ethnographic research (tight observation schedules, reduced periods of observation etc). It could be argued that the further these studies move away from the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of cultural anthropology, the more their ethnographic nature can be brought into question. However, my desire to find pragmatic and appropriate methods to investigate my particular area of inquiry led me to a broader interpretation of ethnography, allowing ethnography both as a methodology and a method, framing the entire period of the research, as well as

including ethnographic episodes and the use of other qualitative methods as appropriate.

3.2.3. Connections to the ethnographic tradition

Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) have defined ethnography as a form of social research which has one or more of the following features: a strong emphasis on exploring the nature of particular social phenomena, rather than setting out to test hypotheses about them; a tendency to work primarily with 'unstructured' data, that is, data that have not been coded at the point of data collection in terms of a closed set of analytic categories; investigation of a small number of cases, perhaps just one, in detail; analysis of data that involves explicit interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions, the product of which mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most (Hammersley and Atkinson, in Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). All of these features appeared relevant to my research.

One particular feature of the exploratory nature of ethnography, and one on which I drew, relates to the method of formulating the precise research question. LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 37) distinguish between the research purpose and the research question. The former represents the ultimate goal of the research, the intended claims to knowledge, and eventual use, and reflects theoretical and conceptual frameworks. It is possible that this purpose will be refined in the course of the research and therefore needs to be described. Questions are more specific, more concrete, and are the tool which enables the researcher to achieve the

purpose. It is suggested that some ethnographers do not provide their questions, in order to avoid giving the impression that their conclusions were determined from the beginning, though it would seem more honest to describe why and how they change, relating them to the development of the research.

At the beginning of my research, I was still exploring ways in which I could research the relationships between motivation and autonomy. This exploration included familiarisation with the literature. Taking the point made in the previous paragraph, it may be said that at this stage I had a research purpose but, when I arranged to go into the school, I had no precise research question. As such, the first phase of my research was restricted to a search for a way of achieving this purpose. Many questions might have emerged; the only constants were the concepts of modern language learning, motivation and autonomy.

I found this open approach to formulating precise questions (which continues throughout the research process) positive on a practical level too. In order to facilitate access, it is important that the research is mutually beneficial to researcher and school. Constant ongoing negotiation is therefore a part of this, as both a constraint (the researcher may have to compromise) and a benefit (it ensures that the research is grounded in practice and 'real' needs, and facilitates ongoing commitment from the school).

3.2.4. Concerns about reliability and validity

Any consideration of the issues of reliability and validity at this point must be located within the research as a whole rather than limited to this first phase. This is because, as I wrote earlier, this first phase served as a prequel to the main research and its status within the whole study is thus limited. After all, was this not merely a way of getting a feel for the school? Essentially, it was a period of 'shagging around', Lecompte's (1969) description of a period which allows the researcher to get to know the people and place, to identify participant constructs, and potential ways of collecting data. What seemed most important to me was to retain the discipline of purpose and to develop a recording strategy which would record my observations in detail so that the focus would emerge in some way, either as a key moment or through a more detailed analysis.

Indeed, given the expansive nature of the data produced some months later in the main phase of the research, it was very tempting in writing this thesis to consider the first phase merely as a further aspect of my personal contextualisation of the research, referring briefly to its role in helping me to focus my research. In the end, my focused research questions in fact emerged mainly from key moments which meant that a detailed ethnographic analysis of my data was not needed. This phase was, indeed, a prequel, not a study in itself, something which happened before the main research but which provides a necessary context for that research. However, inevitably unaware of the way in which this phase would turn out, I had paid due attention to its design, (albeit a "loose, emergent" design, as described by Miles and Huberman (1984: 27), rather than one which was tightly pre-structured),

including considerations of issues of reliability and validity, and I wished to give some flavour of this at this point in order to avoid accusations of sloppiness and lack of rigour.

Nunan (1992: 58-64), drawing on LeCompte and Goetz (1982), has described the ways in which ethnographic studies address the issues of reliability and validity. This can be summed up in the following way:

External reliability	would someone else, on replicating the study, come to the same conclusion?
Internal reliability	would someone else, on reanalysing the data, come to the same conclusion?
External validity	can we generalise to a wider population?
Internal validity	is the investigation measuring what it purports to measure?

These issues are highly contested in ethnography. Nunan reminds us that reliability is threatened by the open, detailed nature of the data, which means that the researcher will inevitably have to focus in a specific way in any published account, making replication or reanalysis by outsiders difficult. In terms of validity, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) argue that ethnography is strong in internal validity (though, as Nunan reminds us, this is questioned by other researchers such as Beretta (1986)). External validity, on the other hand, remains a difficult issue for ethnographers to address, and indeed its appropriateness to ethnography is questioned since the intention is not usually to generalise or compare with other

groups. There are, however, measures which the ethnographer can take to enhance the reliability and validity of the research, each of which I addressed, though some of my measures are more appropriate to the main research phase and will therefore be described in the next chapter.

Firstly, in response to the question of external reliability, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) suggest that this can be enhanced if the ethnographer is explicit about the following five key aspects of the research: i) the status of the researcher, ii) the choice of informants, iii) the social situations and conditions, iv) the analytical constructs and premises, and v) the methods of data collection and analysis. The first of these is described explicitly in both phases of the research, but more fully in the main phase, including a consideration of the ways in which I addressed the issue of power in the research process. The second is also described more fully in the main phase, since the first phase was characterised by observation of many classes, as well as *ad hoc* discussions around the school. At this stage I was happy to have access to any classes which happened to be running on the days of my visits, and where the teacher was in agreement, as I was still unsure of the age group I wished to focus on. Whether this first phase would be replicable from this aspect is therefore doubtful, though I will offer an overview of the classes I observed, and will, in my analysis, refer specifically to the pupils involved in the key moments. The third key aspect is covered explicitly, with the first phase building on the wider context already described in chapter 1 to include a description of the school context and the pedagogical context in which the pupils are learning languages; the main phase will describe the specific context in which

the focused group interviews took place. The fourth key aspect occurs in two ways: firstly, the detailed contextualisation in terms of autobiographical reflections, literature reviews, and research commitments should enable the outsider to understand what was informing my research; secondly, the precise constructs which are explored in the main phase have been partly defined already, but will be refined in the light of the first phase. The fifth key aspect will be covered in both phases, though again, due to the difference in status between the two, it will be described more fully in the next chapter.

In response to the issue of internal reliability, I would suggest that this is addressed in a more realistic way in the next chapter. One of the problems with internal reliability in ethnographic research relates to the limitations of space and the impossibility of including all data (Nunan, 1992: 58). In order to make more space for the more focused research in this thesis, I am of necessity severely limiting the data used in this prequel, selecting only that which relates to the three functions above. However, again Lecompte and Goetz identify strategies for reducing the threats to internal reliability as follows: i) use of low inference descriptors; ii) multiple researchers/participant researchers; iii) peer examination; and iv) mechanically recorded data. In the first phase, low inference descriptors, which describe behaviour in ways in which an independent observer would agree, were problematic: firstly, although I made efforts to record only what I saw, and concentrated on writing down as much as possible, no matter how apparently insignificant it appeared, my attention would inevitably be drawn to events and behaviour which interested me and my research purpose; secondly, the open nature

of the observations meant that an observation schedule, which can be helpful in providing more descriptive data, was inappropriate; thirdly, as my intention was to find possible ways of focusing my research further, inferring thought processes which are unobservable seemed to be a useful way of raising further questions, and not problematic in that I was not claiming that these thought processes were actually occurring; fourthly, as Nunan (1992: 62) also states, high inference behaviours are inevitable when considering issues such as motivation, power and control. Nevertheless, data collected in the main research phase has extremely low inference descriptors as it consists of recordings and transcriptions which offer an accurate representation of what pupils said. Lecompte and Goetz's second strategy was not manageable as a research team was not available. Nevertheless, my data was validated both by pupils and teachers, particularly in the main phase, as described later. With regard to the third strategy, my commitment to the pupils' voices means that raw data is used throughout the analysis of the main phase; extracts from this data has been presented in publications and conference papers around the world, allowing direct access to the pupils' voices for other researchers to reanalyse and validate. Finally, all of my data in the main phase was either recorded using both audio and video, or written down by pupils themselves, and is therefore preserved for validation.

The issue of internal validity is more easily addressed than that of external validity. According to LeCompte and Goetz, this is because of the ways in which data are collected and analysed. Although I would contest the idea of 'measurement' used by Nunan in his definition (Nunan, 1992: 62-3), I would

argue that for a number of reasons my research as a whole was investigating what it was meant to be investigating. The prequel involved a valid approach to the three functions of the first phase, as it was designed to understand the context and to get to know the constructs used within that context. This necessitated a flexible and reflexive approach to the constructs which was made possible by the use of observations in natural settings, and the nature of the data analysis as ongoing. The purpose of the focused group conversations in the main phase was primarily to gain insights into the ways in which the pupils construe their learning.

External validity is more difficult to address. It could be claimed that the detailed description in ethnographic research at least enables it to be compared with other groups. However, the general thrust of my research commitments, in which context, power and voice feature heavily, lead me to question the philosophical basis of the requirement of external validity. Indeed, any notion of validity and reliability have been rejected by Watling (1995: 5) as "tools of an essentially positivist epistemology which sit uncomfortably in research of this kind [image-based research], which is better served by questions about power and influence, adequacy and efficacy, suitability and accountability". I have described an ontological and epistemological position which suggests that truth and knowledge are subjective, situated, local. The intention here is to explore a particular issue in a particular context with a view to learning something about the experience from the inside. I have also wrestled with the relationship between postmodernism and critical theory, and made clear that I am, of course, interested in how my research may offer insights into the larger picture of language learning in England.

However, I am making no claim that the way in which language learning is experienced in this particular school is the same as in another school. and can be generalised. The macro context as described in chapter 1 has led to my asking particular questions; the micro context of my study is not meant to provide answers at the macro level. Its relationship to the macro level is its contribution to theory, which could be described as a form of generalisability. However, even here, there is a recognition that theory itself can also be local, internal to the study itself (as a particular view of the world).

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.3.1. Selecting the school and gaining access

The broad purpose of my research was to explore the relationship between motivation and learner autonomy in language learning. Ideally I would have liked to conduct the research in the school where my interest in this was stimulated, but this was not possible. Fortunately, however, there was an alternative school, suitable for the following reasons:

i) The languages department had been developing flexible learning schemes similar to the one I had introduced, though more fully in German than in French;

ii) The study of urban education which had contributed to my research commitments was stimulated by my own autobiography, so this school, where nearly 30 years earlier I had been a pupil myself, offered an excellent opportunity to work with children from similar working class backgrounds in an urban comprehensive school;

iii) Access to the school would be facilitated by the fact that both my wife and a former school friend were teaching languages in the school when I started the research.

As I have described, I arranged access to the school with a broad research purpose. The letter I wrote to the head teacher (see Appendix 1) at the beginning of the school year stated this clearly, though I was careful to make connections to the current preoccupations of the department (general motivation in languages, boys and language learning, evaluation and development of flexible learning). At this stage, I made tentative proposals with regard to the kind of research activity I would carry out, in terms of both questions and methods. The letter reveals that I was already thinking of pupil's metacognition as a focus, though possibly from the perspective of teachers' insights into how they facilitated this.

Following an enthusiastic acceptance by the head teacher, I arranged a meeting with the five teachers of French and German two months later in one of their departmental meetings. The meeting lasted one hour, during which time I introduced myself professionally (I already knew many of the team socially), describing my classroom experience in an attempt to reassure them that I was not distant from the realities of the classroom. (I was aware of the fact that many teachers consider academics to be impractical and wanted to reassure them that my research would be of benefit to them.) I talked through my research ideas, reassuring the teachers that my focus in observations was on the pupils not on them. I explained the nature of ethnographic research, stating that I was not

intending to carry out extensive surveys or experiments but rather was aiming to understand the lessons from the learners' point of view. I suggested that teachers may like to involve me in the lessons in the early stages as I was simply getting a feel for the classes, observing and noting as much as I could. I also stressed that the intention was to benefit the department as well. I considered this important for gaining access but also ethically essential. I was, after all, going to be gaining from their cooperation and I had no intention that my doctoral research should be something of benefit only to me.

The teachers were pleased, even excited, by the research as they felt it matched their needs too. One of their concerns was that achievement in French was considerably weaker than in German, so they were keen that I work with learners of both languages. The Head of Department, Bill, stressed that they were keen to know what *de*motivates as well as what motivates. I responded that I was happy with this. I suppose I had made too great an effort not to appear threatening to the teachers, and had overcompensated by focusing on the motivated children. I had been concerned that teachers may be reluctant at first to let me meet those pupils who were not motivated in case they spoke negatively about them.

The need to prove myself as a professional was not too great as they already knew me. Nevertheless, a tongue in cheek remark was made by one of the teachers that I would have to prove myself by teaching some lessons. I took her seriously and agreed to do this anytime. I also reassured her that I would probably find it difficult, as I did not want to play the role of the 'know-all' teacher. I was never

taken up on the offer, though I still believe that there was some seriousness in her suggestion, and that I would have had to prove myself had I not been known already.

I also explained how I planned to collect data, highlighting that in this first phase I would like to observe lessons, look at departmental documents, and have informal conversations with teachers and pupils, but that in the main phase I would probably need to conduct interviews. I was clear about the fact that I would be recording field notes, consisting of observations and comments. I did not want the teachers to be cagey about talking to me, but I had to let them know that anything might be valid data which could help me to find my research questions as well as providing contextual information. Again this was for me an ethical consideration.

3.3.2. Collecting and recording data

Two weeks later I began my series of visits to the school by attending the staff briefing where I was introduced to the rest of the staff. This was the start of a series of visits to the school lasting over two and a half years, though these were clearly divided into two phases. The first phase, briefly reported here, lasted for one month and involved four full days of visits during which time I observed all twenty lessons. As this was a purely exploratory phase, I was happy to be directed to whichever lessons were most convenient for the department. I in fact observed classes with all five language teachers working in the school. I also observed all of the classes being taught on Thursdays: four Y9 French classes (two 'top' and two 'bottom' sets); four Y9 German classes (two 'top' and two 'bottom' sets); two

Y10 classes ('middle' and 'bottom' sets); one Y10 German class ('top' set); one Y11 French class ('bottom' set); and one Y11 German class ('top' set). I saw most of the classes once, but two of the French classes I observed twice. (The way I have referred to the classes is the way in which they were referred to by the department.)

For this phase of the research I chose to adopt the role of 'observer-as-participant' (Gold, 1958). For obvious reasons I could not be a complete participant. Nor did I feel that I could be a complete observer, since for me that would imply that the objects of my observation would not know that they were being observed, an unethical and inappropriate position. The role of 'participant-as-observer', though possibly preferable from the point of view of ethnographic research, demanded more time than I had available: I was unable to join the school in any substantial way, so the extent of my participation was limited. I was, however, aware that I had connections to the school, and that I may get involved in the lessons provided that it did not hamper my ability to observe. Thus I was primarily an observer, but also to a certain extent a participant. The way in which I would balance these two activities would, of course, need addressing: I would need some control to ensure that overall I did not slip more into the participant than the observer role. In fact, as it turned out, it was the participant aspect of the role which led me to my research focus, as I discovered that circulating round the classroom during the flexible learning parts of the lessons enabled me to understand more about pupils' understandings and perceptions.

All teachers appeared relaxed about my presence in the classroom. They were quite open and not at all defensive. The pupils also seemed undisturbed by my presence. They tended to be naturally curious at first, but there were no signs of disruption on account of my being there. They were all, without exception, very willing to accept offers of help from me when they had their hands up, and were equally willing to respond to any questions I might ask them individually.

In observing lessons I wanted to adopt an inductive approach, i.e. generate theory (at this stage in the form of research questions) from the data rather than finding data to match a preconceived theory. I therefore decided against an observation schedule as this would pre-empt what I recorded, and tried to discipline myself to note what I was observing in as much detail as possible, and think about it afterwards. Of course this was not always possible, as questions inevitable occurred to me as I made notes; indeed it was not always desirable, especially when I was able to support the pupils in their flexible work, as I realised that this gave me the opportunity to explore further.

My note taking therefore took two forms: I decided that I would use the non-participative method of the 'stream-of-behaviour chronicle' (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 205) whenever the teacher was speaking to the class; this would be adapted slightly whenever students were working individually or in pairs/groups, returning to my place to make notes as often as necessary and convenient. Eventually I started to ask the pupils questions to help me understand what they

were experiencing; these questions were mainly very open ("What are you doing?" Why are you doing that?" "What are you learning from it?").

As Jackson (1990) has said, "keeping field notes is personal and idiosyncratic". I decided to keep my field notes on the left hand page of a notebook so that I could (later) make comments on the right. This was useful as it allowed themes to emerge from the data. My field notes consisted of 'inscription' (quick jottings, for example) as well as occasional 'transcription' (to record precisely something which was said). These were supplemented by 'description', usually in retrospect, of events as I had seen them, both in the classroom and elsewhere in the school (Clifford, 1990). Reflections stemming from ongoing analysis continued to be made in my research journal.

During this first phase I also began to collect information to contextualise my study. I talked informally with staff, noted off-the-cuff remarks, and collected documentation such as schemes of work and policy statements. I decided, however, not to study this in detail at this point as I wished to remain as much of a 'novice' as possible about the formal aims and processes of the school in order to avoid having my attention drawn to areas which might, in fact, not be significant.

3.3.3. Analysing the data

Analysis in ethnographic research goes on throughout, and is not left until the end; in this way, it informs and re-informs the questions. My intention at this stage was to employ grounded theory techniques on both my field notes and my research

journal (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). After observing for a day, I would read my notes and write ideas, questions or key words next to the data on the opposite page. Themes would gradually emerge from these right-hand pages of my data-collection journal, which I would then explore in my research journal in the form of reflections or potential research questions and designs. However, during this phase, the main intention was different from the usual purpose of grounded theory in ethnographic research. I was not planning to write this up as an ethnography, but rather to use ethnography as a method to enable me to identify my research focus. Consequently, the themes which emerged from the analysis were the beginnings of the constructs and propositions on which future research would be based, rather than an end in themselves.

I therefore intend to report my analysis by tracking the development of my questions which arose from a combination of grounded theory and insights from key moments, whilst also providing some contextual information and consideration of appropriate research methods. In the interest of anonymity, all names, including the name of the school, have been changed throughout.

3.4. ANALYSIS

3.4.1. Borough School

Borough School is an 11-16 mixed community school with 1290 pupils (figures taken 1999-2000). It draws on an area in which the percentage of pupils from high social class backgrounds is considerably lower than the national average. Over a quarter of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is above the national

average. There are slightly more boys than girls in the school. Very few of the pupils are from ethnic minority groups; in 2000 only four pupils had English as an additional language. Attainment on entry, as recorded by OFSTED, is below average. Thirty nine pupils have a statement of special educational needs, and 370 pupils (28%) are on the special needs register; both of these figures are above the national average. Standards at the age of 14 and 16, as measured by Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations, are also below the national average. Furthermore, there is a particular concern in the school with attendance: at the end of the 1998-1999 academic year, 15.3% of pupils were recorded as having authorised absences, compared with the national average of 5.9%; school data for unauthorised absence was 1% compared with the national average of 0.4%.

Within this broader context, the Modern Languages Department offers French and German to all of its pupils. Achievement in GCSE German is almost the national average, and German teachers offer opportunities to visit an exchange school in Bochum as well to do work experience there. Achievement in French, however, is well below the national average. To illustrate this, the percentages of examination entrants gaining a GCSE A-C grade in 2001 (the cohort on which I had focused in my main research phase when they were in Y9 and Y10), were 37.37% in German and 22.64% in French. These figures in fact represent a decline in German, as results had been improving steadily over the previous ten years, reaching a peak of 47.57% in 2000. The figure for French is a slight improvement compared with 2000 (21.78%).

Ongoing concern to improve examination standards had led to several initiatives: flexible learning had been introduced (beginning with German), and, just before my field work started, Y9 had been split into two halves according to attainment.

The next section will briefly describe how the flexible learning scheme is organised in order to contextualise the rest of the thesis. This is based on departmental documentation and discussions with staff and represents policy which, it is recognised, is not always carried out in practice for a number of reasons, for example staff turnover.

3.4.2. Pedagogical context: developing flexible learning

Bill had been teaching for 27 years, and had been Head of Languages in the school since the mid-1980s. Committed to mixed-ability teaching, he had always been interested in approaches to differentiation. He became interested in the concept of resource-based learning in the 1980s when he had been seconded for a year to look at teaching and learning across the curriculum.

At the same time, he had started to find modern languages teaching "too stressful", demanding too much "singing and dancing" of the teacher. This had, in fact, been reinforced when he developed a long-term stress-related illness. When languages became a compulsory subject in the 1990s, he began to realise that the teacher could no longer remain "in the centre". Consequently he started to think about how resource-based learning might be applied to the languages classroom, whilst

recognising that this involved more than "throwing resources at the pupils and letting them find their own way".

Initial attempts to develop a new approach were carried out with one class of 15 year olds, and, when the school decided to increase the number of posts of responsibility in the Languages Department, a German specialist was found with experience in this area. Erika was given responsibility for languages in KS3, charged with developing flexible learning.

3.4.2.1. *The scheme of work*

The aims and objectives of language teaching in the school contain explicit references to differentiation and to the development of a learning environment conducive to this:

- to enable students to reach appropriate levels of attainment within the National Curriculum framework
- to cater for students of all abilities within a mixed-ability setting
- to increase students' independence
- to make full use of all resources available within the department
- to provide a variety of teaching and learning modes
- to provide opportunities for social learning and to deepen teacher-student relationships

In order to achieve these aims, the scheme of work is divided into detailed units, each of which is organised to provide a range of learning opportunities around a

particular topic, beginning with teacher-centred activities but moving into more self-managed learning. It also offers an analysis of how this scheme is meant to address the twin aims of differentiation (by resource, outcome and support) and the development of "autonomous students who can take increasing control over their own learning" (Scheme of Work (Content): 1). According to this document, autonomy involves the following:

- *Choice*: pupils are encouraged to make decisions, however simple, for themselves, and are therefore given choices relating to the type of activity, the skill area, the level of difficulty, the method of learning, the mode of learning (individual, pair, group), the equipment (textbooks, worksheets, listening stations, language master, computer etc)
- *Responsibility*: to make appropriate choices, to locate and access the necessary resources (including those stored in other rooms or in the library), and to monitor their own work by means of the record sheets
- *Opportunity*: to develop learning skills which are both specific to language learning and generic in the broader sense of planning, monitoring and evaluating learning, including the set of sub-skills implied by this (time management, target-setting, management of resources and equipment, use of reference materials etc).

The scheme of work was developed collaboratively, though of course with significant staff turnover, new teachers had not been involved in its development (and consequently did not always conform to the agreed system). It also echoes the school aims. For example, the section of the scheme of work referring to learner

independence and co-operation is related to the school aim of producing adults who can take responsibility.

3.4.2.2. *Managing a flexible learning unit of work*

According to the documentation, responsibility for managing learning is shared between the teacher and the pupil, with the pupil taking the lead, subject to the guidance and approval of the teacher. For Bill, progression is "at their own pace in negotiation with the teacher" since the Department recognises that for some pupils "own pace" means "sitting in a corner and chatting about football".

This is facilitated in the following way:

i) At the beginning of each unit, pupils are given a record sheet which includes a unit description of what they will be learning in each skill area (listening, speaking, reading and writing) formulated as 'I can...' statements. Based on performance in the previous unit, pupils begin by setting themselves targets for the independent work in the new unit (e.g. 2 x level 2 activities, 4 x level 3, etc) and entering these onto their record sheet. This is done in negotiation with the teacher. The extrinsic reward for achieving the targets is a 'gold slip', a commendatory note which is placed in pupils' records.

ii) The teacher then introduces some of the core language to the class using traditional communicative methods. After meeting the language, pupils practise in small groups and individually. The ratio of whole class work to independent work varies according to the nature of the class and can be decided by the class teacher.

iii) Central to the management of this stage of learning are the Study Plans, which pupils use to choose learning activities. For reference only, these provide access to a range of activities and resources. These can number anything up to 150 for any single unit, and make use of existing course book exercises as well as activities custom-designed by the teachers.

Within a unit of work there is a Study Plan for each National Curriculum level (since there are eight levels, this means that there are potentially eight different Study Plans for older pupils, each one printed on a different colour for ease of access). Pupils refer to these and choose tasks according to their targets, ensuring that they practise all four language skills. They also need to cover all content areas of the unit in reaching their targets.

Bearing in mind that pupils' individual differences include differing levels of independence and confidence, it is considered necessary to allocate tasks to some pupils. Particularly in the early units, choice of task is increased gradually.

iv) On completion of each reading and listening task, pupils use answer sheets to assess themselves. Speaking and writing tasks are usually assessed by the teacher. At the end of the lesson, pupils enter the date, activity, skill area, level and score of the task(s) they have completed onto their record sheet which is kept in their exercise books. This is monitored and initialled by the teacher, as a way of ensuring that pupils are making progress and challenging themselves.

v) In order to meet their targets, pupils have to do homework tasks, but they choose these on an individual basis. Tasks which are suitable for completion at home (i.e. those which are self-contained on the sheet, since pupils cannot borrow course books or cassettes) are highlighted as such.

vi) At the end of each unit, summative tests covering listening, reading and writing are available at all National Curriculum levels. As it would be inappropriate to set one test for all pupils in this context, pupils attempt tests at three chosen levels in order to confirm their achievements. Speaking skills are assessed continuously during independent work.

vii) Teachers have their own record cards for each pupil. For each unit the marks from the unit test (or, in the case of speaking, the class work) are recorded. Where there is a marked difference between pupils' class work and test performance, this is noted. Record cards can be passed on to the next teacher if the pupil moves to a different class or if the class gets a new teacher at any point.

3.4.3. Observations in the classroom

I have stated that it is beyond the scope of the thesis to offer a full ethnographic picture of the language learning classrooms I observed. I shall therefore restrict my analysis to the three functions outlined above, and this will necessarily include some examples of ways in which motivation and autonomy manifested themselves in the classrooms as further contextualisation.

Of the eight Y9 lessons that I observed, four of them involved some amount of flexible learning. Of these, three were German lessons (two taught by Erika, one taught by Carol, an experienced teacher with responsibility for KS4). The French lesson was taught by Kathryn, a teacher who had been teaching for two years, who selected a number of items from the scheme from which her pupils could choose. Other lessons involved some element of independent learning, though this did not involve the flexible learning scheme. One example was a Y10 French class taught by Bill in which pupils were preparing their 'dossier sonore', writing scripts for their GCSE Modular assessment. Another example was Sharon's Y11 French class preparing a cassette for their GCSE speaking assessments.

The notes I made on the right hand side of my data collection journal were wide-ranging. For example, when Sharon, who had been teaching for twenty years, stated before the very first lesson I observed (a middle set Y10 French class) that one of the problems with languages is that the children do not realise that they have to learn, I noted the question 'What is learning? Is there a mismatch in understanding between teacher and pupil?' When, in the second lesson (Y11 lower set French with Sharon), I noted that a pupil was working quietly at the back of the room, busily engaged in copying her own script so that it would be neater and easier to read out when she recorded herself, (she insisted that she was not going to *learn* it), I asked myself what 'working' meant and how useful this task was that she had set herself. Other forms of data I recorded were gender balance, seating plans, teacher activities such as sharing lesson objectives, use of flashcards,

instructions, as well as examples of teachers making reference to learning strategies, examples of pupils' awareness of their own strategies, and ways in which motivation and lack of motivation were manifesting themselves. I also noted down attendance, which was often very poor, e.g. the Y10 middle set French class should have had 30 pupils but only had 23 in attendance the first time I saw them, and 19 the week after; the Y11 German lower set had 10 out of 24 pupils present; the higher set 25 out of 31.

Before I describe how my eventual focus evolved, I shall offer some brief examples of both autonomy and motivation in the classroom, though this is purely for the purposes of offering a flavour of the classrooms.

With regard to autonomy, points I noted included the following:

- Sharon asking her Y10 French middle set what they should do if they cannot understand something they are listening to. (Responses included leaving it in the hope that it will be understood on the second hearing, and guessing.)
- Sharon's Y11 French lower set choosing where to record onto their cassettes, at home or in school.
- Sharon offering reference sheets to support her classes with their preparation, which some used well and others ignored, preferring to ask the teacher (or me).
- Erika encouraging her Y9 higher set to read the questions before they listen to the tape, in order to try to anticipate what it may be about.

- Two girls in this class checking their speaking answers, then practising it again.
- Erika offering advice on how to plan work in terms of what is suitable for classwork or homework.
- Erika asking her Y10 German higher set why they are doing a particular task, which was a model letter for adaptation. (The response was 'to pass the test'.)
- Y11 lower set filling in their records of achievement, and being asked to comment on their feelings, attitudes, achievements and targets.

With regard to motivation, points I noted included the following:

- High levels of absenteeism, and Sharon suggesting it was because the class was doing a test.
- A girl in Sharon's Y11 French lower set telling me that they've had five different teachers since Y7, (as soon as the teacher left the room).
- A boy in the same class asking what the top mark achievable in that class was (a C grade), and shouting 'Top mark! I'm going for a C!'
- Ryan (also in this class) telling me that he does not like French, and that 'teaching's OK – you get paid to shout at kids!' (I was then told that he has a contract with Rotherham FC and that this was the reason he may not pass his examinations.)
- Erika rewarding her classes with songs, videos or ten minutes 'free choice' at the end of lessons.

- A girl in Erika's Y11 German lower set saying she cannot understand any German after doing it for so long. ("I can recognise some words, like 'dog', but that's all!")
- Two girls in Kathryn's Y9 French higher set saying they prefer independent work as they can choose what they feel like doing.
- Girls facing the back of the room in Bill's Y11 German higher set, and hardly engaging in the lesson at all.
- Pupils not having books, pens and other equipment.
- Lateness to lessons.
- Homework not being done.
- Lots of chatter.

I have deliberately not sequenced these comments in order to give a feel for the randomness of my observations. In fact, after two half-days of observation I wrote in my research journal that I was feeling overwhelmed as I did not yet know what I was looking for. So many issues related to my general questions were springing to mind as I observed. This was a particularly exhausting period of research. On the one hand I wanted the lessons to wash over me, keeping my mind open and relaxed to be able to view what was going on as objectively as possible. On the other hand I felt pressure from myself to identify something which would focus my research, so I was also actively 'looking', and this looking was obviously based on my preconceptions as an ex-teacher with positive experience of flexible learning. This tension between being passive and active, reactive and proactive, objective and subjective, relaxed and pressured, and between feeling and thinking,

characterised this whole first phase. I had to work hard to keep convincing myself that this state was necessary. The temptation to focus my research questions prematurely was intense. In order to overcome this, I started to brainstorm various potential foci, which constituted a self-imposed control mechanism to keep my mind open whilst contributing to initial analysis. Indeed, as LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 44) suggest, analysis is the way in which a subjective researcher provides a control for biases.

Issues and possible foci which began to emerge at this stage (taken from my research journal) were as follows:

i) Focusing on those students who have an aim (such as going to Austria/Germany on the school trip) but where this does not lead to motivation to work independently in the classroom (can't be bothered to get a worksheet).

ii) The notion of 'busy-ness'. For those students good at being 'busy', what constitutes 'work'? (e.g. writing out dialogues, re-doing work for neatness, doing tasks without really understanding why, doing written 'work' in order to avoid having to do speaking tasks).

iii) Focusing on particular task types, or skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing), or strategies (compensatory strategies, self-management strategies), or metacognitive knowledge (person knowledge, task knowledge, strategic knowledge).

iv) Focusing on choice - why they choose certain tasks, what constitutes quality in choice.

v) Focusing on target setting.

vi) Focusing on a particular year group (year 9 or year 10).

vii) Focusing on those who fall between the motivated and the demotivated, the 'neither-nors', those who are on the borders, the 'can't-be-bothereds', the 'lazy' (what does this mean anyway?), the apathetic...

(source: research journal 26 November 1997)

At the same time I started to think about possible research methods.

> "How will I do this? I'm aware that my raising of questions will probably influence their learning anyway - just showing an interest or raising awareness. If they 'can't be bothered', can I ask them to keep a learner diary, tick extra boxes or anything extra? How will I identify them anyway?"
>
> (source: research journal 26 November 1997)

However, my research focus crystallised in a series of 'key moments' rather than through systematic analysis. To conclude this section then, I shall describe those key moments.

3.4.4. Finding my focus

Through retrospective analysis I am able to identify the key moments which led to my main research focus. These could be defined as moments of significance in which an occurrence connected not only with my research purpose but also with my research commitments, and sparked a desire to investigate further. I shall describe each moment as a mini-vignette.

Key moment 1

This occurred in Erika's Y9 German lower set at the end of my first day of observation. The class were spending the lesson on flexible learning, thus providing me with an opportunity to speak to pupils. The first pupil I spoke to was

Michael who was getting on quietly with his task. I asked him to explain his record sheet and he was very willing to speak about that. I then asked him why he was doing a particular task, a wordsearch. He explained that he had a target of six Level 1s, six Level 2s, and three Level 3s, and this was a level 1. (He also pointed out that he'd set himself harder targets but that the teacher had encouraged him to adapt them.) I then asked what the point of the worksheet was, and he said it was to see if he recognised the words the class had learnt, e.g. Bahnhof. I then asked him how this helped him to learn. He replied that if he were reading German he would not know all the words, but that if he saw one of these words it would tell him that it was something about a station.

I asked two other students the same question straight afterwards, and, after considerable amounts of prodding, one boy said he was doing it to get ticks and the other because it was easy.

I found these different perceptions fascinating. Of course they may have reflected personality issues (Michael was clearly more confident than the other two), but they also suggested completely different understandings of what they were doing. It could be said that Michael's metacognitive knowledge with regard to task purpose meant that he connected with the task much more than the other two, who were unconcerned about purpose or content.

I then started to collect other instances of this and a pattern started to emerge which I began to classify as follows:

- surface awareness of self-management e.g. "I need to do some writing", "I need to do fifteen tasks to get a gold slip", "I want to make it neat"
- deeper awareness of self-management based on self-assessment and diagnosis of learning needs (metacognitive knowledge of self and task) e.g. "I need to do something which will help me learn the spellings because I'm not very good at them", "This will help me to find my way when I'm in Germany"
- something in between the previous two, revealing task knowledge but not necessarily self-knowledge e.g. "It's to help you practise listening"

This suggested the possibility of exploring links between metacognitive knowledge and motivation as a concrete, focused way of approaching my research purpose. What was also interesting as I collected further examples, was that there appeared to be no pattern with regard to higher or lower sets. In fact, some of the deeper levels of response came from students in the 'bottom half', which meant that there was not necessarily a link between self/task awareness and 'ability' (at least not the type of ability which informs allocation to different 'halves').

Key moment 2

On my second day of observation, I spent the first two French lessons with Sharon, first with her Y10 middle set, then with her Y11 lower set. In the first lesson, Sharon had tried hard to enthuse her class though use of voice, humour and encouragement, but the class as a whole had looked bored (or was it tired?) whenever she was speaking, with lots of yawns, chins and heads resting on hands,

reluctance to join in. However, when asked to write something about Sheffield, using a range of different resources, they seemed to wake up, and produced good personalised pieces of writing. At the end of the lesson, Sharon said that it was hard always to do lessons like that, as it demanded lots of work from the teacher in order to wake the class up. (She also pointed out that often she has to spend the same amount of energy calming them down.) She made the observation that the idea of pupils working harder than the teacher was unrealistic, as pupils were not motivated enough and did not know enough.

Y11 in the second lesson continued to work on the tapescript for their speaking assessment. I noticed Scott, working in the middle of the class, shout out to Sharon (who was speaking to someone else at the front) "Miss, what's three o'clock in the morning?" Sharon did not hear, so Scott looked briefly in the dictionary (three seconds) and then started to walk around uttering "trois heures" to himself repeatedly. Eventually he went up to Sharon, checked that "trois heures" was correct, returned to his seat and continued to work.

I then went to look at what Natasha was doing. Natasha was the girl who had spent most of the previous weeks' lesson copying her transcript neatly. Unfortunately, however, she had still not managed to record it, but planned to do so the following day in school. She was now preparing for her writing assessment in which she had to describe a weekend in Paris. She had written "Le voyage était chouette parce que c'était courte" but was now "stuck". Her first reaction was to want to ask the teacher what to put next. When I started to look back in her book, however, she

became interested, flicked backwards and forwards, and eventually found a tapescript on a journey to Spain which she went on to adapt successfully (and with great concern to get the timings absolutely right). She later moved on to a description of shopping, this time finding a relevant dialogue for herself and adapting this. She appeared to be really pleased with herself, pointing out that she did not know she could work it out for herself and would normally have given up and asked the teacher.

Reflecting on these two lessons later, I was struck by the focus of some of the pupils on the teacher. Sharon had clearly spoken to the pupils about how they can use reference materials, but both Scott and Natasha still needed either confirmation from the teacher or support with working through how to refer back to previous work. Yet pupils in the first lesson had clearly been more motivated when they were working independently. This raised questions for me about how levels of motivation related to dependence on or independence from the teacher. I wished to understand how the pupils perceived their role and the teacher's role in the learning process, and who had 'control' over whether they learned at all, and how well they learned. I later noticed other related examples of this, e.g. Carol's Y9 German higher set in which a group of pupils had finished playing a revision game but took the initiative to make up additional rules so they could play it again, without asking the teacher. I noticed that some pupils were more willing as well as more able than others to take responsibility for managing their own learning. For example, two boys in Erika's Y10 German higher set took a while to get started on their work, and then did not really know how to proceed, beginning to look up

every single word in a model letter they were adapting. They told me they did not really like German.

Key moment 3

At the end of Erika's Y10 German higher set lesson, Kerry was sitting on a desk starting to eat her crisps. As I packed away, I asked her if she liked German. "The teacher's OK," she said, "but German's boring". I asked what she meant by that and she said "It's always the same - pets, school, things like that. It'd be easier if we enjoyed it." What was her perception of the language lesson here? The implication of her observation was that she thought she was learning about pets etc in her German lessons. I realised that she perceived the lesson in terms of content and meaning, and not in terms of language. In lessons largely focused around linguistic objectives, no wonder she was bewildered about what she was supposed to be learning. She could not understand why the teacher was teaching them about animals. The bewilderment and consequent boredom rested on a mismatch of understandings about the content and purpose of the curriculum, and I wished to know how she viewed these in more depth.

This key moment was followed by a number of related incidents. One occurred when Gemma (also Y10) described German as stupid, useless and boring. I asked her what was stupid about it. She said "well the alphabet's stupid!" What was she meaning by this? How did she perceive the German language? Certainly not as a form of communication which had any meaning for her, but more as an object. I thought about this as I sat at the back of Kathryn's Y9 French higher set where she

was using flashcards to introduce new language. I was struck by the possibility that use of flashcards might help to create a distance between the learner and the language that is being learned. As the teacher showed flashcards representing different rooms in the house, I wondered to what extent the learners were making connections between the language and their own worlds. Was it possible that such methods were actually objectifying the language? This confirmed my interest in exploring the idea of 'relatedness'.

On my last day of observation, I spoke to Luke (Y9 higher set) who was doing a Level 3 task answering open-ended questions. He told me that he liked French because it would enable him to speak if he went to France, and that he would be able to buy things. He was trying to construct complex sentences, and asked me how to say 'because' and 'lazy' (he was writing that he does the hoovering at home because his mum is lazy), noting these down. I asked him what the letter was about, and he said it was about what people do in the house. When I asked him what he thought about that, he replied that people would not speak about things like that if they were on a business trip. He went on to say that they sometimes learn "stupid things, like what colour your hair is, when you can see for yourself what colour it is!" and asked "when am I ever going to want to say 'sofa' or 'bed'?"

The key moment with Kerry had raised questions about the ways in which pupils perceived the content of the curriculum, the extent to which they found it relevant

to their lives, and made me wonder about the extent to which the independent learning offered opportunities for them to learn language which related to them.

3.4.5. Preliminary thoughts on research methods

The key moments, which then focused my attention more closely on similar incidents, had raised a number of specific areas related to the pupils' knowledge and perceptions of their learning. During this period it also became clear that the value of classroom observation was limited as far as my overall research purpose was concerned. The most interesting insights came when I was talking with pupils. By asking them to explain what they were doing and why they were doing it, I realised that there was a whole range of understandings regarding the nature of learning and learning tasks which I wished to access. Some pupils seemed to relate to the learning content and activities, revealing, for example, an understanding of what the intended purpose of an activity was, how it fitted in with their own particular learning needs, and how to approach it, as well as a readiness to take charge of this. Others seemed to be working without understanding the point, and others of course were trying to avoid work altogether. Interestingly such understandings seemed to correspond not to achievement levels, but to levels of motivation.

It was clear then that I needed to move on from spending time in the classroom, as I could not continue on an ad hoc basis going round speaking to children in lessons. In order to access the type of data which my key moments were suggesting, I would need to speak with pupils much more intensively.

3.5. REFLECTIONS ON PHASE ONE, AND CONCLUSIONS

This prequel has described how I entered the field with a broad research purpose in order to find a focus. This focus would have to correspond not only to my purpose, but also to the research commitments I had made for myself. Undoubtedly because I had those specific commitments, my eventual focus corresponded with them. Despite my efforts to keep an open mind, I had, in fact, found what I was looking for. It also unsurprisingly related to the literature I had simultaneously been exploring. I knew now that I wanted to learn more from the learners, and that this would include what they believe and know about language learning (learner beliefs/metacognitive knowledge), and how they perceive their role in this (motivation beliefs focusing on locus of control, attribution and relatedness). In other words, the voices of the pupils would be explored through aspects of their knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs. I am conveniently grouping these together under the general umbrella of 'constructions of learning', and will define this carefully in the next chapter.

In some ways this was the most difficult stage of my research. It was a time of great insecurity, losses of confidence, disorientation. I was still battling with the feeling that I should have known more precisely what I was doing before I started. Though corresponding with my epistemological stance, the loose, emergent design of my research was difficult to handle pragmatically, since it was more time consuming than I could afford, (which is also one of Miles and Huberman's (1984: 28) justifications for favouring research designs which fall between the tight, pre-

structured and the loose, emergent, but which are closer to the former than to the latter). The absence of any supervisor did not help this ethical confusion. Of course, I had read books on doctoral research (Phillips and Pugh, 1994, for example), so I was aware that there would be low psychological points. I was also aware from conversations with colleagues that 'messy starts' were quite usual, that I was not the only person to sit in a classroom in the early stages of research wondering what I was doing. I was also aware that they were methodologically essential.

The breakthrough in my research actually emerged from a dark moment. Attending an early January conference on school improvement in Manchester, I was feeling depressed by the conference and its focus on consensual approaches to 'improvement'. Where was the voice of the child in all of this? Why was no one interested in understanding what represented success and failure from the point of view of the people living and growing up in the urban areas which seemed to be a particular focus of the academics present? Once again, I realised that the objects of school improvement were essentially those real people who were my family and friends.

I then attended a session by Jean Rudduck entitled 'Making a difference: taking seriously the students' agenda for school improvement', which called for more research into learners' perceptions of schooling. In one fell sweep, my confidence as a researcher was established, since I realised that my aims, questions, concerns, frustrations were all legitimate. I had not been barking up the wrong tree. In fact I

had been simply struggling to escape from narrow notions of research and from my own background of deference to the teacher brought about by my own socialisation. I had myself been looking for my autonomy as a researcher, searching for my 'voice', but desperately in need of confidence to pursue my own ideas and to trust my academic judgement.

From that moment on, my focus has been entirely on the learners.

PART TWO: LEARNERS' VOICES

4. RESEARCH PHASE TWO: ACCESSING LEARNERS' VOICES

4.1. INTRODUCTION

In the early chapters of this thesis I have tried to locate the origins and development of the main focus of my research which is related to the voices of the learners as expressed in their beliefs and knowledge about what language learning is, what processes are involved in it, and what their role in these processes is or might be. This focus has arisen from consideration of my personal and professional background, the national picture of language learning within the broader picture of education in the UK, the social justice issues of underachievement and disaffection in particular sections of the population, urban education theory, prior research into both motivation and learner autonomy, ontological and epistemological considerations and the resultant commitments which underpin my research, and key moments in the first ethnographic phase of my research. The latter also led to a recognition that I would have to select research methods carefully.

This chapter will describe the design of this main research phase. It will define my questions precisely and describe the methods I used in order to explore them. I also present a working understanding of different aspects of 'voice', ranging from the articulation of ideas, to control over learning, to influencing others.

4.2. LEARNERS' VOICES

4.2.1. Listening to learners' voices

As I have described, I wanted to paint a picture of language learning as construed by pupils in an urban context and I was committed to doing this through listening to and privileging their voices, through "thinking through others" (Shweder, 1990: 32), rather than through indirectly basing my understanding on what the teachers were saying or doing or on what forms the teacher-student interactions took.

Within the general literature on education, Nicholls (1992) has postulated that students have many theoretical ideas about education, including the nature and value of knowledge and how it should be acquired, and suggests that teaching would benefit if we took them into consideration when planning. However, as recently as 1993, in a study focused on capturing learners' inner voices, Herr and Anderson (1993: 2) claimed that "few researchers have systematically probed the subjective experience of school life as disclosed by the students themselves". Given that the aim of teaching is that learners learn, it is surprising that in the UK there has been relatively little educational research into the ways in which learners themselves think about their learning, and how this affects the learning processes in the classroom and beyond. In the UK, research into pupil perspectives has on the whole focused on affect, including attitudes towards school and to teachers and peers, rather than on metacognition.

This has started to change, influenced by developments in the social sciences (Tomlinson, 1989: 156). In 1996, Cooper and McIntyre followed up an earlier

study into teachers' perspectives on English and History classrooms (Brown and McIntyre, 1993) by adding the pupil perspective, exploring their 'classroom craft knowledge'. They comment on the sophistication of the Y7 pupils' responses and the need for teachers to consult with them more in a variety of ways since "they are a vital source of useful information about their own learning processes and the ways in which contextual factors (classroom, task, peer and teacher variables) interact with these processes" (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996: 159). Also in 1996, Driver et al. (1996) explored the effects and outcomes of students' beliefs about knowledge and ways of knowing in science.

In broader educational terms, the work of Rudduck and her colleagues (Flutter, Kershner and Rudduck, 1998; Rudduck, 1998; Rudduck, Chaplain and Wallace, 1996; Rudduck, Day and Wallace, 1997) has been significant. Rudduck maintains that learners' insights into the school and their learning are of benefit to school improvement:

> "Schools might usefully start the process of improvement by inviting their pupils to talk about what makes learning a positive or disappointing experience for them; what enhances or diminishes their motivation and engagement; and what makes some of them give up and others settle for a minimum-risk, minimum effort position - even when they know that doing well matters. Taking account of the students' perspective in planning for change can really make a difference." (Rudduck et al., 1997: 74)

4.2.2. Defining language learners' voices

So far in this thesis, I have deliberately been using the concept of 'voices' quite loosely to include a range of meanings. An examination of the language learning literature in the fields of motivation and learner autonomy reveals a number of

studies which in some way contribute to the picture of language learning from the learner's perspective, though there is no consensus on the distinctions between the different terminologies used to describe these perspectives. In order to provide a clearer understanding of the meaning of 'voice', I have at this stage identified three categories from the literature. In order to understand the learners' views of the world, and to explore the relationship between motivation and autonomy, my research includes opportunities to explore all three.

The first type of voice refers to learners' knowledge about and perspectives on language learning, and includes both cognitive and psychological aspects of learning. This is a complex type of voice which encompasses a number of areas of study and terminologies, including, in the field of learner autonomy, metacognitive knowledge (e.g. Wenden, 1999b) and learner beliefs (e.g. Cotterall, 1995; Horwitz, 1987, 1988; Wenden, 1999), learner representations (e.g. Holec, 1987, Wenden, 1996), experiences of language learning (e.g. Benson and Nunan, 2002), conceptualisations (e.g. Breen, 2001), constructions (e.g. Ellis, 2001; Oxford, 2001), conceptions (Benson and Lor, 1999), expectations (White, 1999), and attitudes and perceptions (e.g. Chambers, 1999). Some of these are interpreted broadly, whereas others, such as metacognitive knowledge, are more specific. Some stem from different research traditions and education or SLA theories, e.g. 'learner representation' stems from constructivist theories on cognitive development (Wenden, 1996). Other studies have attempted to research and theorise the relationships between some of these constructs (e.g. Benson and Lor's (1999) hierarchical definition of conceptions, beliefs and approaches), or the

distinctions between them (e.g. Wenden's (1999a, 1999b) work on metacognition and beliefs). What they have in common is that they offer insights into aspects of language learning from different perspectives.

The second type of voice concerns involvement in and influence over the management of learning. This relates to, for example, self-management contexts in which learners are potentially able to have a voice in what they are learning in terms of making choices, and planning and evaluating learning. It does, of course, overlap with the first type of voice, but here it is more related to ways in which the learning environment enables learners to have a voice in their learning.

The third type of voice is that which is related to radical concepts of agency and resistance. According to Giroux (1988: 199), it refers to "the means at our disposal [...] to make ourselves understood and listened to and to define ourselves as active participants in the world". For Pennycook (1997) it is necessarily a political act and involves struggle. Again there is overlap with the other two types of voice, but this one resides specifically in the conflict paradigm, operating as a form of resistance. It is the voice which may be sought when the other types of voice are not heard, and when "learners are encouraged to see themselves as negotiators and fighters" (Ellis, 2001: 84). It is helpful to draw on Elbaz's (1990: 17) observation of teachers' voices:

> "Having 'voice' implies that one has a language in which to give expression to one's authentic concern, that is one is able to recognise those concerns, and further that there is an audience of significant others who will listen." (Elbaz, 1990: 17)

For Pollard, Thiessen and Filer (1997), in their study of primary children, hearing this voice represents a commitment to improving the quality of school life through taking their views seriously and acting on them rather than simply carrying out objective, disinterested work. It thus set out to challenge "those who hear pupils' voices in a spirit of interest, sympathy or amusement, but make no commitment to analysis or follow-up action" (ibid.: 1).

4.2.3. Voice and perspectives as constructions in my research design

My research is based on an assumption that the learners have ideas, and that they are capable of exploring these ideas and expressing them. As such, the learners can be assumed to have their own epistemologies.

> "Voice is the interpretation usually associated with the perspective of a particular individual or group. In any research setting, there are many ways to tell the story of events, both past and present. Each participant, including the researcher, comes to a project with a different set of background experiences, beliefs, and values, and each interprets what happens in a different way. This creates multiple voices and cross-cutting, often conflicting, discourses." (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 160-161)

The intention, however, is not to explore these voices with a view to identifying weaknesses in them, nor to dismissing them as "myth, folk tales, pagan delusions, or mistaken beliefs" (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 161). All of these voices can be viewed as constructions, particular versions of reality made up of constructs, with construct being defined as "an abstract or general idea inferred or derived from specific instances" (source: Webster's *Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913) accessed on http://dict.die.net/construct/). In other words, a construction is produced within a context and results from particular experiences. It does not exist

in a vacuum: it cannot exist without the person who construes, but neither can it exist without a context. This notion of construction draws on Kelly's (1963) work, in which constructs can change with experience of the world:

> "... we consider a construct to be a representation of the universe, a representation erected by a living creature and then tested against subsequent events. In other words, a construct is tested in terms of its predictive efficiency." (Kelly, 1963: 12)

I find it useful to construe constructions as individual ways of viewing the world of which we can be conscious or not, which are developed within a social context and which can change through and in response to experience, sometimes deliberately for particular purposes. They also develop in a context in which "opportunities for learning are constrained by inequalities of power at home, in the workplace and in the community, inequalities marked by inequities of gender, ethnicity and class" in which "language learning is not a skill, but a complex social practice [...] not just a matter of becoming a better and more autonomous language learner" but having to do "with making the link between the achievement of understanding and the achievement of access to rights and goods" (Candlin, 2001: xix).

I accept that it may be difficult for pupils to articulate some of their constructions. These constructions may also develop during my attempts to access them. Together with researchers in the field of 'cultural psychology' (Stigler *et al.* 1990), however, I would argue that "our representations of reality (including social and psychological reality) become part of the realities they represent", and that this justifies the study of constructions which may be shared or adapted in the process.

My main focus is on the range of constructions in groups of children, not in order to generalise them to the whole group, but to take account of the point that individual constructions are co-constructed. To quote Isaiah Berlin (1976: 89, quoted in Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001: 141-2), presenting Vico's eighteenth century challenge to the Cartesian approach to scientific research, there is a need to move to a concern with describing "human experience as concretely as possible, and therefore to emphasize variety, differences, change, motives and goals, individuality rather than uniformity...".

4.3. DESIGNING THE RESEARCH

4.3.1. Defining the questions

> "In designing a study of students' representations, the step from general features of interest to specific questions which can guide the development of research tools is an important one." (Driver et al., 1996: 59-60)

Initially I was concerned that my commitment to privileging pupils' voices may be compromised by the increasing focus of my questions which would necessarily influence the research design. However, I did have specific questions by now, and I was also limited by my time and the pupils' time which meant that I could not 'live' with the pupils in the hope that insights would emerge. Nevertheless, I would need to build in safeguards to ensure that the design did not restrict the pupils' voices, that my questions were as enabling as they were defining.

Based on my own assumptions and experiences but also on Rudduck et al.'s (1997) experience that pupils sometimes find it difficult to talk about learning as

they have not been able to develop a language for it, I decided to focus my questions on those constructions which related to metacognitive knowledge and beliefs whilst offering opportunities to explore more general aspects of the learners' constructions.

Specifically, I wished to gain insights into the following main question:

i) What relationships are there between learners' constructions of language learning and their motivation in this urban secondary school?

In order to explore these relationships, I am construing constructions as metacognitive knowledge (defined by Flavell (1979) as person, task and strategic knowledge) and beliefs, in order to address the following sub-questions:

ii) How do the pupils construe the role of the learner (including themselves) in language learning, specifically in terms of control over learning?

iii) How do they construe the task (i.e. the nature and purpose) of language learning, both generally and in their own experience, including how it relates to their own lives?

iv) How do they construe the individual tasks involved in language learning, and how might this inform the ways in which they take control of their learning?

v) How do they construe the strategies they use in order to learn, and how might these contribute to their learning?

Overall, the intention is to build up a comprehensive picture of language learning as construed by the learners in order to allow an exploration of the ways in which different aspects of learners' constructions combine and relate to motivation in this specific context.

Given the common practice of using the terms metacognitive knowledge and beliefs interchangeably, I did not originally set out to distinguish between the two in the research design. However, I was interested in what may emerge from the learners' own constructions, and planned to reflect on this in the conclusion. After analysing the learners' person knowledge, however, I realised that it was important to distinguish between two types of knowledge in this context; the first type was knowledge gained about the realities of learning in this particular context, and related specifically to what they knew about themselves and their own learning contexts; the second was related to knowledge, whose origins it was unlikely to be able to specify, about learning in general. As it started to emerge that the two were not necessarily the same, it seemed useful to refer to the former as knowledge and the latter as beliefs. For example, beliefs about what makes a good learner were not always the same as knowledge about how they as individuals learned. The congruence or incongruence of knowledge and beliefs thus became an additional, and quite significant analytical construct throughout the analysis. It also shed light on ways in which the learning context influences motivation.

I decided to focus my research on pupils in Y9 moving into Y10. Firstly, these pupils would hopefully have had sufficient experience of learning languages in the

school (two years) to be able to discuss the ways in which they had been learning. Furthermore, Y9 had been identified as a 'problem year' by the languages department, and also by Chambers's (1999) research. (In fact, this age group has become even more significant since September 2004, since it is now the age when pupil are able to choose whether to continue with language learning or not.)

4.3.2. Limitations of the research focus

It is important to state a number of limitations to the research questions at this stage, in order to clarify what I was *not* exploring.

Firstly, with regard to metacognitive knowledge, it is important to clarify that although I used the term broadly in one sense, e.g. to include beliefs, I was not expecting to be able to reveal what actually happens when learners learn. In the language of cognitive psychology, I planned to explore *declarative knowledge* rather than *procedural knowledge*, which is the way in which Anderson (1983, 1985) distinguishes between what we know about and what we know how to do. I could therefore only claim to be accessing their *espoused* theories, i.e. those they are able to describe, and not their *theory in use* (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Schon, 1983, 1987). One implication of this was that my questions would invite comments on learning in hypothetical situations rather than using, for example, 'think-aloud protocols' (Faerch and Kasper, 1987; Grenfell and Harris, 1998) which attempt to monitor cognitive processes involved in an actual learning activity. In short, I was attempting to access 'the product of underlying processing and not the process itself' (Seliger, 1983: 187). Driver et al. (1996: 57-58) point

out the importance of making this distinction. Referring to Rowell and Dawson (1983), they write that "students' views of the nature of science may not be reflected in the way that they approach scientific investigations. Students assert one thing and sometimes do something quite different!"

Secondly, and for reasons which I have already indicated, this study focused entirely on the learners' constructions. I was not carrying out research with teachers. I am not implying that teachers cannot offer insights into the everyday experiences of the learners, but such insights would not represent the pupils' voices. Like Mirón and Lauria (1998), I therefore have to recognise that my focus was somewhat one-sided, but such studies are rare, and I intended this research to help to redress the balance.

Thirdly, the constructions are clearly related to the specific context of the research. According to existing research (e.g. Phares, 1976), beliefs might even vary in individuals from subject to subject. The questions therefore focused on language learning within this school.

Fourthly, I was focusing on the relationship between metacognitive knowledge and beliefs and motivation. Though it would have been useful to relate this to achievement too, this would be problematic as I was committed to a conflict paradigm, avoiding deficit theories, and therefore unable to isolate achievement from the social and educational context of the learner. Any useful study which included this variable would need to consider such broader influences on the

learner and study development over time, rather than defining achievement factors in any fixed way.

Fifthly, and obviously from my epistemological perspective, the research was descriptive rather than predictive. Although I had specific questions to investigate, I wished to keep my control at a minimum recognising that it is impossible to control or explain all of the possible variables which might affect the phenomenon. I therefore do not claim to have been looking for conclusive ways of determining certain behaviours, but rather describing and interpreting the data produced in order to suggest possible ways forward.

4.4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.4.1. Looking for a method

I have already provided critiques of prevalent research methodologies in my earlier chapters, and suggested a number of ways in which this is starting to change. Use of new methodologies is, however, still in its early days in research into pupils' perspectives in language learning. Drawing on my background in urban education, I also looked at literature available in other areas such as health education studies (e.g. Backett and Alexander, 1991; Boyle *et al.* 1989), and research into police interviews (Dent, 1982; Roy, 1991).

I was concerned with quality of response rather than quantity. I was not interested in large samples which would require highly structured questionnaire type methods, since these might:

- provoke responses where none might otherwise be given, skewing the data
- discourage open responses which might at first glance seem tangential or inappropriate, but which might reveal a pupil's real preoccupations
- not easily allow an in-depth understanding to emerge
- prevent a dynamic dialogue which allows meanings to be checked and refined
- assume that learners are always aware of their beliefs rather than allowing this to be explored

I was, however, also not convinced that methods such as use of learner diaries or introspective/retrospective accounts would be appropriate. Learner diaries rely on written confidence and willingness to complete them regularly, and can be an imposition over a period of time. I in fact wanted to limit the amount of writing in the research as I was aware that some of the students may potentially feel disempowered by over-reliance on the written word. Introspective accounts are more useful for accessing knowledge-in-action in the form of strategies than deep-seated knowledge or beliefs. I also admit to personal scepticism about their use. I am sure that I would find it very difficult to talk about what I am thinking and how I am doing something at the same time as actually doing it. Retrospective accounts seemed to be more promising since they could ground the discussions in real events which may be easier and more valid. These, I believed, could be useful as one way of accessing the learners' thoughts, though again I was aware that

children's memories vary (a point raised by Victori, 1999a), which meant that such accounts could not be the only data-gathering instrument.

I needed a methodology which would enable me to carry out an exploratory study. Also, the data collected would only be empirical in the sense of "observed reality" (Powney and Watts, 1987: 3), if this recognised the multiplicity of realities and ways of 'observing'. Though I felt that an ethnography as such was no longer appropriate, I would still need to draw on ethnographic methods and techniques.

It was clear to me that I wanted pupils to be able to express themselves in ways which they may not be used to, so I needed a method which would enable them to feel comfortable, and also where they would be able to challenge or praise whatever they felt needed challenging or praising. I needed to provide an environment in which any possible learned understandings of power relationships could be suspended temporarily, though I recognised that this would be impossible to achieve completely. As the ideas would be complex, I was also keen on encouraging social interaction as a way of helping learners to articulate their constructions. I decided that some form of group interview would be most appropriate as the main data collection method.

4.4.2. Choosing interviews as a research method

As in Driver et al.'s (1996: 66) research into students' perceptions of science, I decided that the use of interviews represented a middle ground between a written survey and a more naturalistic methodology based on classroom observation.

Furthermore, this still fitted in with my rationale for using ethnography; as Walker (1985) has pointed out, certain types of interview are the main tool of ethnographers.

Much has been written about interviews as a research method in education (e.g. Holstein and Gubrium, 1995; Powney and Watts, 1987). However, my ontological and epistemological positioning, combined with my research commitments and the need to find ways in which the learners could be supported in "bringing this knowledge to consciousness and talking about it" (Wenden, 1999b: 436), called for a specific approach to interviewing. This has also been suggested by Block (1997) who, as a result of dissatisfaction with a previous 'hands-off' interview technique, applied Kelly's personal construct theory in order to listen to language learners.

Holstein and Gubrium's (1995) 'active interviewing' offered me inspiration. As the series editors write in the introduction to this book,

> "To Holstein and Gubrium, interviews are social productions. With their orientation, respondents are better seen as narrators or storytellers, and ethnographers are cast as participants in the process. Working together, the interviewer and narrator actively construct a story and its meaning. Interviewing, then, is inherently collaborative and problematic." (p. vii)

For Holstein and Gubrium, it is important to see the interview as an opportunity for knowledge to develop, particularly when researching difficult issues which are not "casually topical" (p. 18), i.e. data which might not emerge easily or naturally. Strategies used in the interview process will encourage the production of a

potentially complex range of meanings: encouraging links between various experiences; inviting interpretations of situations and resources; developing ideas which are locally appropriate. This approach to interviewing arises from a commitment to hearing voices which are often considered 'incompetent' for research purposes. The argument is that researchers will tend to choose respondents who will be able to express themselves well, and will avoid those (such as children) who are viewed as having 'narrative incompetence' (p. 21), e.g. the 'twittering titterer' (Eales, in Powney and Watts, 1987: 113).

An example of this is Eales's research (in Powney and Watts, 1987: 112). Eales suggests that interviewing pupils is "potentially problematic as well as infinitely rewarding". He warns that some children may steer the conversation away from the questions (though in fact he, like I, was not too concerned about this), that some may lack confidence and be reluctant to voice their opinions, that they may not be used to offering their opinions in the classroom setting, and that they will be wary if the interviewer is unknown but also wary if the interviews are being conducted by the teacher. Eales responds to this by carefully selecting pupils who he feels are likely to voice their opinions. This means, however, that certain voices remain silenced, which could not be justified in my own research.

Clearly then, interviews, if designed appropriately, would enable me to address my research questions. Holstein and Gubrium, however, focus more on individual interviews. For a number of reasons, I decided that interviews in groups would be

more appropriate. One of these related to the fact that I would be interviewing children.

4.4.3. Interviews with children

Drawing on the work of Goodwin (1997), Holmes (1998: 1-2) has observed that:

> "Few anthropologists have examined the life worlds of children. This is due in part to the notion that children's social and cultural worlds are imperfect in comparison to the adult world they will eventually enter. Children's life experiences in their social worlds and peer cultures are presumably viewed as unimportant because the goal of socialisation is to produce a culturally competent adult."

As such, research methods literature specific to work with children is also uncommon (Holmes, 1998). Literature specifically addressing methodological issues involved in qualitative research with children includes Bell and Osborne (1981), Fine and Sandstrom (1988), Holmes (1998), Pellegrini (1996), and Pollard et al. (1997). Much of this focuses on the mechanics of research. For example, Bell and Osborne (1981) have produced practical guidelines which include the need for particular listening and clarification techniques, the need to avoid being identified as the teacher, the need to check meaning, the difficulties involved in encouraging students to assert their views, the possibility that they will take things more literally, and specific access requirements. LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 181) suggest that "children's responses are less linear than those of adults; they require opportunities to return to a topic and address it from a different perspective". Holmes's contribution has been to include a consideration of the ways in which the gender and ethnicity of the researcher might affect the process with children.

There are undoubtedly specific considerations relating to children. I find, however, that many points made in the above checklists evolve from a particular notion of the child, namely passive, unclear, unsophisticated thinkers and could also be made about many adults. Rather than accept this, I maintained a commitment to the dignity of children as children rather than as potential adults, and thus needed to examine critically and on an ongoing basis any such conceptions of childhood which may reside within me.

4.4.4. Interviews in Groups

A number of researchers look to group interviews as a way of approaching issues specific to researching with children (e.g. Ferrell and Compton, 1986; Lewis, 1992). For a number of reasons this seemed to be the most appropriate method for my research.

Firstly, difficult concepts may be approached more easily in groups where individuals are able to bounce ideas off each other. This provides a more natural and less threatening environment, in which children will influence and be influenced by others, where they may feel more able to ask questions or say they do not understand, and where they have more space for reflection on what to say as others talk, thereby allow potentially richer input and enhancing reliability and validity (Lewis, 1992: 416). The group context may also encourage children to disclose events and opinions which they would not have disclosed if they had not been introduced by someone else (Lewis, 1992: 415) and makes it less likely that important issues and ideas will be overlooked. It may in addition offer insights into

the processes of interaction: how ideas are formed, knowledge is produced, and the effects of having one's ideas challenged. Of course, there will be some analysis on the individual level, but the focus is more on the group as unit of analysis.

On a practical level, interviewing in groups offers access to more voices in less time, causing less disruption. An idea of the range of constructions can be gained through, for example, the use of 'participant construct surveys' (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 162-163) whenever appropriate. Through brainstorming, for example, I would be able to elicit not only a range of constructions, but also the ways in which pupils categorise or sort them. LeCompte (1980), for example, describes how she asked very young children to tell her the things they thought that they and the teachers could do in kindergarten, and how she used this to develop a typology of children's perceptions of pupil and teacher roles.

Insights may also be gained into what pupils agree or disagree on. Schatzmann and Strauss (1973) have, for example, suggested that group interviews are useful for discovering variation in responses and finding out what is controversial amongst 'bonded' groups.

Finally, there are issues which relate to myself as adult male researcher working with children. Apart from the problems related to being alone with an individual child (Holmes, 1998), there are also issues of the perceived power of the adult which may encourage individuals to say what they think they should say rather

than what they really want to say. In a group context, the power of the interviewer is reduced, and it is almost possible to forget that this is an interview situation.

Of course concerns can be expressed with regard to group interviews. One concern is that some children may say things they do not believe because of the influence of stronger pupils. Similarly, undecided children may decide to keep quiet. These concerns have also been raised by Lewis (1992: 416), but she responds by saying that this is also the case in the classroom so it is relevant, even though individual responses might be distorted. Given that the group is the main unit of analysis, and given that the aim is to access constructions which exist and are produced in a social environment, where people are influenced by one another and can change their minds on this basis from one instant to another, I also believed that this is justifiable. The pupils might well 'tell a story' related to time, place, audience and their own objectives (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 28) in order to make a point, but this does not mean that the data is invalid. If this happens, it will be their way of making sense of their knowledge, their way of making it coherent.

4.4.5. Thinking forward to analysis

As my commitment was to accessing the learners' own constructions, I was in favour of analysing them by means of a grounded theory approach, though, as I have said with regard to the research questions, I could not pretend that I did not have a particular agenda.

In designing this phase of the research, then, I created a framework which would enable pupils to express their voices whilst ensuring that my own specific questions were addressed. Tools of analysis had to be sensitive to this issue, allowing sufficient flexibility to enable new constructs to emerge. (The early distinction between knowledge and beliefs during the analysis was an example of this.) In other words, I was combining a normative (or 'nomothetic') approach, in which aspects of interest are first identified and then used as a basis for analysing learners' ideas, with an 'ideographic' approach, in which an attempt is made to understand the students' responses in their own terms (Driver et al., 1996: 58).

4.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.5.1. Criteria for selecting the pupils

Having decided to explore the voices of Y9 pupils, the question now arose of which pupils to include, as it was impossible to study the whole year group in the way that I wished. The notion of a representative sample seemed to me to be a problematic one. Firstly, as Powney and Watts (1987: 189) suggest, it is problematic to claim that any individual can represent a group. Griffiths (1998), in constituting research groups of teachers also noted that "none of us speaks *for* any particular group, and, equally, almost nobody is one of a kind among the above categories" (p. 309). Secondly, as Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 21) point out, selection for representativeness can be a way of excluding certain voices who appear unrepresentative, e.g. the extremely motivated, the 'quiet' ones, or, more likely, the extremely disaffected.

My intention was primarily to provide opportunities for varied voices to be heard. There has been a great deal of research into how children behave in groups. Lewis (1992: 418) cites Hartup (1978) who suggests that many factors will affect children's responses within the group, such as gender, personality, age, perceptions of ability by self, peers and teacher, attainments, attractiveness, popularity, friendship patterns, sibling relationships, and group size. In terms of composition, therefore, I wanted to offer a safe environment, and therefore decided to have varied groups, but with each group being as homogeneous as possible in terms of achievement (as defined by the languages department) and perceived motivation to learn languages. As Krueger says: "The danger is that people tend to be hesitant to share and will defer their opinions to someone else in the group who is perceived to be more knowledgeable, wealthy, or influential" (1994: 14).

Although my aim was "not to infer but to understand, not to generalize but to determine the range, not to make statements about the population but to provide insights about how people perceive a situation" (Krueger 1994: 87), it is essential to describe what makes groups distinctive, in order to suggest whom they *might* represent. I decided to work with four different groups of Y9 pupils, two being drawn from the higher achieving half of Y9 and two from the lower achieving half. In each half I wished to work with a group of motivated pupils and a group of unmotivated pupils. The groups were therefore constituted as follows:

9A1	lower achievers, motivated
9A2	lower achievers, not motivated
9B1	higher achievers, motivated
9B2	higher achievers, not motivated

Four groups seemed a reasonable number given time constraints. In addition, Morgan (1988) has suggested that highly structured, exploratory research requires very few groups (two is the minimum number), whereas with relatively unstructured groups aimed at producing a detailed content analysis six to eight groups are recommended. Glaser and Strauss (1967) also refer to 'theoretical saturation' after which few new ideas are forthcoming.

I decided on a group size of six, wanting a range of students present, but not too many to make it feel like a lesson or to inhibit them. This number is supported by social psychologists: Breakwell (1990, referred to in Lewis, 1992: 418), for example, recommends groups of six or seven. I was also aware, however, that a smaller group would become unworkable if there were high absenteeism (which in fact happened on two occasions when I had to cancel the meetings).

In order to select the pupils, I decided to use quota selection (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 72-3) mainly according to level of motivation and range of achievement (the latter in order to provide a safer environment rather than to enable me to draw this variable into the centre of the analysis), but also according to gender and languages learnt (at the request of the school). Of course I recognised that no selection procedure is perfect (as Krueger (1994: 82) also points out), since even if the researcher wishes to specify the profile of the participants, they will still only be those who agree to take part and continue to attend.

In terms of achievement levels, it made sense to draw pupils from the two halves of Y9, firstly because the pupils may feel more comfortable in those groups, and secondly because all classes in each year half were taught simultaneously. This meant that I could always take pupils from language classes. I had already decided to involve students from any teacher's classes, though I recognised that this would cause concern to some researchers. My reasons for this included the following:

a) I was not interested in narrow notions of causality, such as the ways in which individual teachers' beliefs affected their learners' beliefs, since the establishment of cause and effect is extremely complex and belongs in a different research tradition.

b) All students had already had a number of different language teachers anyway.

c) I hoped to stimulate articulation of learners' constructions of learning through group discussion and potentially diverse and contradictory beliefs and positions. In other words, I wanted to use potential controversy to encourage voice.

In the event, students were selected from two classes only initially (Claire's French class and one which had been Erika's German class before she left at Christmas). However, as the class moved into Y10, they were rearranged and split up, moving into a number of different teachers' classes.

Identifying who was motivated or not was more complex. As Van Lier (1996: 102) points out, motivation is made up of both tangible factors, such as intensity of engagement, attention, effort, and persistence, and intangible factors, which

learners themselves may be unaware of, such as intention (Deci et al., 1991). In any case, accurate 'measurement' was unnecessary since my questions were neither intended to produce generalisable evidence of any causal relationship between motivation and constructions of learning. I therefore decided to ask experts (the teachers) to suggest students who they felt to be motivated or not, making clear to them that I did not wish to exclude potentially uncooperative or particularly quiet pupils. (Alpert (1991) had similarly asked teachers to select from each class 6-8 average and above-average students for his study). I also planned to include questions which related to their motivation at various points throughout the process which, in combination with a background questionnaire (see Appendix 2), would help me to build up a picture of their motivation.

4.5.2. Interview design: initial considerations

Powney and Watts (1987: vii) describe research interviews as "conversational encounters to a purpose", but I needed to decide what form the conversation should take. Initially it seemed that I had a choice between Powney and Watts's (1987) 'respondent' and 'informant' styles, in which the former represents a tight approach to interview design (with participants responding to questions posed by the interviewer), and the latter a more open approach (with participants informing the researcher about what they consider to be important).

Of these styles, it was clear that only the 'informant' style would be appropriate to my questions. I did not wish to parallel the teacher-controlled classroom by developing 'interviewer-centred' approaches, replicating the power structures that

I was wishing to explore. However, for reasons already identified, I did not feel able to carry out unstructured interviews, where the interviewee provides the structure, a purist interpretation of the ethnographic interview as used by Woods (1980, 1986, 1990, 1993) in his ethnographic studies in schools.

Tomlinson's (1989) 'hierarchical focusing' was one approach to interviewing that offered insights into resolving the dilemma of being both open and closed in the interview procedures and the data analysis. His approach to 'having it both ways' consists of a number of strategies: moving from the general to the specific, from the open to the closed, but only moving when necessary, when there is a block in communication; maintaining the interviewer's non-judgemental stance; eliciting spontaneous accounts. At the data analysis stage, Tomlinson suggests the strategy of analysing what came spontaneously and what was more directly elicited in order to differentiate between learners' own constructs and the researcher's agenda items. In this way, he suggests that we are not left with the uncertainty about "whether this exhausts what the interviewee *could* have said or merely represents their performance on a particular occasion in response to a minimally framed 'stimulus' event or idea" (1989: 173).

I have already described how Holstein and Gubrium (1995) introduced me to interview types which would enable me to "cultivate the respondent's narrative ability" (p.76), accessing deep-seated knowledge. Roy's (1991) application of Geiselman et al.'s (1984) work on cognitive interviewing offered further strategies. This approach, used by Roy in his work in the police force and

informed by cognitive psychological principles of memory, uses a variety of strategies to encourage crime witnesses to recall details which are lying very deep in their memories. It is based on the idea that memory can be activated or hindered by techniques used in the interview. For example, encouraging people to recreate both the external and personal contexts that existed at the time of the crime, or to tell the story from a variety of different perspectives, are ways of jogging the memory. On the contrary, the use of frequent closed questions, interruptions, sequences of questions which are not compatible with the memory of the events, negative phrasing, distractions, lack of follow-up of potential leads, and judgmental comments, can all serve to hinder recall. The potential application of this to my research design was obvious: encouragement to think back to specific positive experiences and tell the story; opportunities to respond as the teacher might, or as a good language learner might; formation of sequences of questions and the wording of the questions themselves. All seemed to be compatible with the ways in which I might have encouraged learning in the classroom, and to be sensible strategies for encouraging deeper reflection.

Another type of interviewing which influenced my design considerably is that carried out in focus groups. I was initially drawn to focus groups by their name, which conveys the idea of people having a discussion on a focused topic rather than being interviewed by an expert. I believed that focus groups would treat the participants as experts since the aim is to gain insights into their own perceptions (where they are undoubtedly the experts). As this was the atmosphere I wished to convey in my research, I decided to explore the focus group literature.

Searching for 'focus groups' in the Institute of Education library did not reveal much evidence of their use in education, though Mertens (1998: 174) clarifies one of the main distinctions between a group interview and a focus group when she writes that "focus groups, in essence, are group interviews that rely, not on a question-and-answer format of interview, but on the interaction within the group". Anderson (1998: 200) also describes a focus group as "a carefully planned and moderated informal discussion where one person's ideas bounce off another's creating a chain reaction of informative dialogue". The work of Krueger (1998, 1998a, 1994), Greenbaum (1998), and Morgan (1988), all Americans involved in research in a range of contexts such as business, marketing, medical, suggested that they are adaptable to new contexts.

Focus groups were originally used in the private sector for market research purposes, though they have increasingly been used in the public sector. According to Krueger (1994: 6), they are defined by their size, purpose, composition and procedures:

> "The researcher creates a permissive environment in the focus group that nurtures different perceptions and points of view, without pressuring participants to vote, plan, or reach consensus. The group discussion is conducted several times with similar types of participants to identify trends and patterns in perceptions. Careful and systematic analysis of the discussions provide clues and insights as to how a product, service, or opportunity is perceived.
>
> In summary, a focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. It is conducted with approximately 7 to 10 people by a skilled interviewer. The

> discussion is comfortable and often enjoyable for participants as they share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion."

Mertens's (1998: 174) recognition that "the focus group interaction allows the exhibition of a struggle for understanding how others interpret key terms" led me to consider that they may offer a strategy for encouraging young people to articulate fairly difficult concepts. This was reinforced by Anderson's (1998: 200) comment that the focus group "not only discloses what is important to individual respondents, but the group setting simulates a synergistic environment resulting in a deeper, more insightful, discussion".

Looking at the literature, I was struck by the generally tight structure of most focus groups, with progressive question development designed to focus participants' discussions in on the issue being explored whilst encouraging their voices to be expressed openly through the informal, interactive environment. I began to realise that structure does not necessarily take away voice. On the contrary it can be a kind of framing strategy designed to enable participants to express their voices. It was at the level of questioning therefore that attention would have to be carefully directed when it came to designing the research.

4.5.3. Designing the interviews

4.5.3.1. *Focused group conversations*

Drawing on all of the above interview types I began to design a series of interviews, each with a different focus but retaining a spirit of openness, dynamism, spontaneity and interaction in order to support the articulation of what

may be difficult constructions. As an interviewer, I saw myself more as a facilitator, creating an enabling environment and critically monitoring my own power and influence as far as possible. The interviews would need to be enjoyable and non-threatening for participants. They did differ from focus groups, however, in several ways: unlike many focus groups, pupils would know each other; they would be carried out in the normal school environment rather than in a neutral one; there would be no remuneration for participation. Furthermore, though I would refer to the overall structure of focus groups, I would include a range of techniques to encourage talk, and would not be restricted by the prescriptive nature of many focus group handbooks (e.g. Krueger, 1998, 1998a). I was also unhappy that the notion of focus group had gained popular notoriety through its use by the Government as a consultation tool, and that this had become associated with tokenism. For these reasons I began to call them 'focused group conversations' in order to differentiate them from the formulaic focus group.

Given my questions, I decided that I would need six focused group conversations with each set of pupils. An additional reason for this was that, unlike Ebbutt (in Powney and Watts, 1987: 104), who did not know the names of the sixth formers he interviewed in one-off group interviews, I hoped that the groups would become increasingly comfortable, encouraging a more in-depth exploration in an atmosphere of trust and confidence over time, whilst allowing me to revisit issues in different ways. I also decided that meetings should last 50-60 minutes, partly since this appeared to be an optimum length in the research literature (e.g.

Krueger, 1998), and partly because meetings could thus be carried out in lessons if this were agreed.

4.5.3.2. *Considering the nature of questions*

Holstein and Gubrium (1995), Roy (1991) and Tomlinson (1989) suggested approaches to questioning which informed the development of my protocols as well as my spontaneous input in the course of the conversations. When it came to designing the protocols, however, I found myself having additional issues to consider.

Given my commitment to voice, my initial plan had been to develop open-ended protocols in the form of 'topic guides' which, according to Krueger (1998: 9) consist of "words or phrases that remind the moderator of the topic of interest". On reflection, however, I became concerned that the discussions could easily go over the heads of the pupils if couched in complex language. I realised that the language needed to be considered carefully, and that the overall shape of the interviews would need to be developmental in order to build pupil self-confidence.

I therefore decided to develop detailed protocols containing questions and stimuli which would be meaningful and appropriate to the pupils. I hoped that these would have the additional benefit of improving my chances of being able to identify similarities and differences between the different groups I would be meeting. However, having made this decision, I was again faced with the issue of how to minimise my influence. I have described the value of Tomlinson's (1989)

hierarchical focusing here, and in fact I found this easy to develop since it is a form of questioning with which I was very familiar from the languages classroom, where it is used as a form of differentiation. It is also essential in oral examinations, where it enables pupils to 'perform' to their potential. It consists simply of moving from open-ended questions, which give pupils the opportunity to provide their own answers in an unrestricted way, to more defined questions for those not confident enough to cope at that level (see Convery and Coyle, 1999).

Generally speaking I planned to use open-ended questions as far as possible. If the pupils found it difficult to respond, however, or if there was something more specific I wanted to find out, I would follow up the initial question with cues or more focused questions. Nevertheless, I would still avoid questions which only gave them the choice between two possible answers such as 'yes' or 'no' (what some researchers, e.g. Patton (1980) and Krueger (1994), have called 'dichotomous questions'), unless this was to clarify something after a period of discussion.

In the early stages I also planned to avoid 'why' questions where possible, since these can intimidate pupils, implying that there always has to be a reason for certain behaviours when in fact pupils might have no rational explanation. Another problem with 'why' questions, admittedly not too serious a problem for my research as I was open to any interpretation on the part of the pupils, has been pointed out by Lazarfield (1986). According to his 'principle of specification', 'why' questions are ambiguous in that they can relate to both personal motivations

(i.e. 'what prompted you?) and attributes in the activity or object itself (i.e. 'what features appeal?'). Thus the question 'why did you choose to do this particular task?' can be answered 'because the teacher told me to' or 'because it's interesting'. On some occasions, of course, such ambiguity was intended as I wanted really to find out what the pupils' first reactions were.

As well as trying to ensure that I was not leading the pupils to answer in certain ways, I also needed to reflect on the assumptions on which the language in my questions might draw (see Briggs (1986) for a sociolinguistic perspective on interviewing). As Powney and Watts (1987: 14) have said,

> "In listening to interviewees, the interviewer needs to hear via the same linguistic and social framework to make sense of what is being said."

Although I saw this as an aspiration rather than something easily achievable, I believe that in this research I was helped by the fact that I have shared a similar background to these pupils. Nevertheless, the nature of the interview as a "complex speech event" (Spradley, 1979: 68) needed to be remembered and this called for constant critical awareness of meanings during the meetings themselves, and critical reflection on possible alternative meanings and interpretations during the analysis. Clarification would be sought where necessary. Pupils would be asked to explain what they mean by vocabulary such as 'boring', 'work' and 'learn', in order to try to understand the concepts from their points of view, though care would need to be taken not to overdo this as it could disrupt the flow of the discussion.

4.5.3.3. *Designing the protocols*

Before discussing the protocols themselves, it is important to state that I did not intend them to be a 'constraint' but rather a 'resource' (both of which are, according to Giddens (1984), forms of control, but which produce different effects). I would, where possible, follow the direction of the pupils' voices, offering them the space to voice whatever they wanted. As Ball (1983) puts it:

> "The interviewee is asked to elaborate, illustrate, reiterate, define, summarize, exemplify, and confirm matters in his talk in ways that would be unacceptable in other talk situations."

The main focus of each conversation was as follows, though themes reoccurred at various points throughout the six conversations (to enable pupils to revisit different foci in different ways and over time, as well as to ensure that my research questions could be answered):

FGC1 Introduction: exploring general constructions of school, subjects and language learning;

FGC2 Person knowledge: exploring ways in which these pupils describe and evaluate themselves as language learners, as well as gaining insights into what they believe to be a good language learner;

FGC3 Task knowledge (general): exploring what pupils believe the nature and purpose of language learning to be and how they perceive the language learning process in the classroom;

FGC4 Task knowledge (specific): exploring their knowledge and beliefs about learning tasks and activities, including their rationale for choosing specific ones;

FGC5 Strategic knowledge: exploring what pupils know and believe about learning strategies;

FGC6 Evaluating language teaching and learning: revisiting many of the above foci through an evaluation of teaching and learning and a discussion of resistance strategies.

Each of my protocols was developed through a series of six or seven drafts, beginning with a broad outline, filled in slightly more as I worked on the preceding protocol, and reworked and reordered both for content (on the basis of ongoing informal analysis of the previous meeting, largely consisting of a review of what had been covered and what had been left out or what needed further exploration) and for language.

Space does not allow me to go into more detail about the rationale for each of the questions or activities here, though reference will be made to this in the analysis. For now, I wish to draw attention to several general principles which affected the design of the protocols (which can be seen as Appendices 3-8).

4.5.3.4. *Overall structure of the protocols*

Krueger (1998) describes five types of questions which enable the researcher to sequence the interview. Drawing parallels with my own experience as a teacher planning lessons, I decided to follow roughly the sequence proposed, but adapt it as appropriate. It seemed to me to be a sensible way into complex issues. Many people need time to feel at ease, to 'warm up', to try out their voices in front of

others. As a teacher I would never launch into a discussion without introducing what it is about, for example.

Krueger's (1998) five types of questions are as follows:

i) Opening question

ii) introductory question

iii) transition question

iv) key question

v) ending

Following a brief introduction to the purpose of the meeting, and a link back to the previous meetings, the opening question was designed to be an opportunity for everyone to speak. It was also an opportunity to identify the speakers for the purposes of the recording. It was often something factual, not necessarily directly related to the interview, but providing useful information about the students' lives. I used this as an opportunity to find out, for example, what they did in their free time, what kind of ambitions they had for the future, where they usually went on holiday, and whether or not their brothers or sisters had been successful in languages. This was different from Krueger's recommendation that this opening question should not be used to elicit information for analysis.

The introductory question was a warm-up as well as a means of introducing the main topic of the meeting. Particularly in the earlier meetings, I tended to use some kind of activity to involve the students (brainstorm, writing a report or a list),

though occasionally I kept this part of the meeting brief. The main objectives were to get the students thinking about the topic, usually with the opportunity to give opinions without too much reflection, and to enable them to feel more confident about joining in. The most successful introductory questions were those which did not ask students to think about themselves, but which offered the chance to talk generally about the topic or an aspect of it. Brainstorming was useful here since it enabled students to give ideas which did not necessarily have to be their own, but which nevertheless offered insights into their awareness of the issues. This turned out to be crucial as it contributed to the differentiation between learners' knowledge and beliefs.

Transition questions were very similar to introductory questions but, following Krueger (1998: 25) tended to "make the connection between the participant and the topic of investigation". Essentially, this section would ask the students to think about their own learning in respect of the topic in a more direct way than the introductory question.

The key questions, though central to the topic of study, differed from Krueger's in that they were not necessarily the main focus of the focus group discussion, the questions to which everything else had been leading. If anything, they were distinctive for their level of difficulty. This divergence from Krueger's recommendations reflects the overall difference between focus groups and my focused group conversations. Each meeting had a focus, but my commitment to voice and my awareness of individual differences led me to approach the focus in

a variety of ways to maximise potential response. Hence each section took on greater significance than in Krueger's groups.

My ending questions followed Krueger to the extent that they were crucial to analysis. They tended in various ways to form some kind of overview. Thus I was able to find out which aspects of the conversation were most important for them, in order to offer insights into the relative values placed on the points they had made. (This was not the only point at which this was done. Other activities, discussions and brainstorms addressed this need on an ongoing basis and in different ways, but the final question had a broader focus.) In some cases the question introduced a new but related angle in order to provide further internal validity. In other cases they offered the opportunity for reflection on the discussions.

4.5.3.5. *Inclusion of varied activities*

I have already described the influence of a number of researchers on the design of my instruments. I drew happily on any ideas which I felt would encourage pupils to articulate their knowledge and beliefs. I also felt an ethical responsibility to design conversations which would be enjoyable and worthwhile to the pupils, and believed that this would create a positive atmosphere in which they would be able to express their voices. Given the school context of high absentee levels, it would also make it more likely that pupils would attend a series of meetings.

In fact I found myself drawing on my own teaching experiences in many ways beyond the differentiated questioning discussed above. Indeed, I reflected that many of the activities drew on PSHE-type activities, which offered food for thought in terms of how this type of research may be carried out more extensively by teachers themselves, as a form of pupil consultation. Variety of activity was important; the range of research activities can be seen in the protocols, and included:

- Brainstorms, either as a warm up or as a way of establishing a range of ideas, in which pupils would also be asked what should be noted and how.
- 'Concept mapping' (Powney and Watts, 1987: 30), in which pupils' ideas would be placed onto the board in a certain order, e.g. to trace the language learning cycle collaboratively from the introduction to the end of a new unit. (This is useful when the issue is about sequence of activities or ideas rather than just the ideas themselves, since it allows a visual support to the discussion).
- Contextualised questions, encouraging pupils to think back to specific learning experiences (the last module, an occasion where they did well, a specific activity they enjoyed). For example, when I wanted to establish what had actually happened rather than what might happen I would contextualise the question in this way.
- Direct questions, even though it has been suggested that the quality of children's talk with adults is diminished by features such as highly specific questions, and questions rather than comments (Dent, 1982; Tizard and Hughes, 1984). I was aware from my teaching experience that some pupils

respond better to direct approaches, and I wanted to make sure that my group discussions were differentiated enough to allow these voices to emerge.

- Projective techniques, which stimulate the imagination, thereby opening up the mind to deeper forms of expression, facilitating access to ideas which are abstract (LeCompte and Preissle 1993: 164). They also enable students to give 'unsafe' opinions in a 'safe' way (as they are projecting them onto a different person or a different context).
- Use of drawing, e.g. an imaginary languages classroom of the future. (See also Ryder (1978) who got his respondents drawing a picture of how they thought a nuclear reactor works).
- Questionnaires involving, for example, sentence completion.
- Self-rating scales, not in order to get statistical precision but to stimulate discussion (e.g. FGC4), to provide further background information about the students (e.g. FGC1), or to help students clarify perspectives before sharing them (FGC5, FGC6).

4.5.3.6. *To pilot or not to pilot?*

I decided that pilot testing of questions in this research context was problematic. As Krueger (1998: 57) writes:

> "More than other forms of social science research, the questions used in a focus group interview are hard to separate from the environment of the focus group. If the focus group fails, how do you know that the cause was the questions and not the moderator, the room, the recruiting, or a host of other factors?"

Other factors would in my opinion include the make-up of the groups and the enormous range of potential interactions as participants bounced ideas off one another. In addition, each group of students could be expected to produce different understandings of the questions, different responses, different possibilities for follow-up questions etc.

I therefore decided to use a reflexive approach to my meetings. As I planned to organise a series of meetings with each group, I would have the opportunity of clarifying issues, following up questions, or approaching the same points in a different way if the groups found the first approach inaccessible.

4.5.4. Defining my role

Woods (1986: 62) views ethnographic interviews as being "of a rather special character, somewhat akin to participant observation", which means that they cannot be carried out and reported as if the interviewer's presence were irrelevant to the data produced. Given my aim of encouraging the pupils to voice their constructions, I needed to give careful consideration to my role in the meetings. I was undoubtedly 'chairing' these meetings, a disadvantage of any interviews in groups, though I hoped that this would be counterbalanced by the less intimidating surroundings of the group as opposed to the individual interview, and by the strategies I used to promote a certain ethos.

Clearly I could not disguise the fact that I was involved in education, and similarly I brought a certain kind of status simply by being an adult and, possibly, by being

a man (Holmes, 1998; Warren, 1988). However, I would refer to myself as a researcher and writer, committed to taking seriously what they had to say in order to pass it on to a wider audience. I would draw on Rogerian interview techniques, summarised as a commitment to displaying empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence throughout the interviews (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996: 27; see also Rogers, 1951, 1980). From the moment they were invited to participate onwards, I would do my best to convey my assumption that they had knowledge to be shared and explored with each other. I would reinforce this by asking if they had found each other's ideas useful or interesting, or if they had tried out any of the ideas from previous meetings. Of course, this can be seen as a form of 'teaching', since the students were undoubtedly learning from each other in the process of the interviews, which makes Powney and Watts' (1987: 30) advice to avoid the temptation to teach slightly problematical. As far as I was concerned, the students were indeed being encouraged "to explore and make explicit their own understandings" (ibid., 31), but, viewing this as 'learning', I found it hard to claim firmly that I, as facilitator, was not 'teaching'. What I was definitely not doing, however, was teaching in the sense of passing information or attempting to transmit my own values. Indeed, I had to ensure that I avoided assumptions in my questions and follow-up discussions. For example, if I was asking questions about the way the teacher organises lessons, I had to 'forget' my knowledge of the language learning cycle and try to explore it as a non-expert might.

The implication was that I would have to exert self-control in conversations in order to avoid offering personal views which pupils may be tempted to see as the

'right' answers. This of course would not be easy, given the increasingly informal nature of the conversations, and, indeed, it was not always possible to maintain as I wanted also to develop honesty and trust in the relationships. I was not prepared to lie about my identity, viewing this as unethical, but I was prepared to focus more on certain aspects of myself than on others. My identity as former pupil of the school, as husband of one of their former teachers, as former classmate of one of their other teachers, for example, would be made clear at an early stage. If asked (as happened only after several meetings in fact), I would 'come clean' to being a former teacher myself, and would talk about my students at the university, but I did not wish this to be the primary label attached to me.

In other ways too I planned to avoid behaving like a teacher, though this was by no means straightforward. What would I do if the pupils ran around and refused to participate? Or if they constantly interrupted each other? There were ethical issues about condoning activities which I knew to be banned from school (use of mobile phones, chewing gum etc) or of which I myself did not approve (e.g. being unkind to each other, making racist or sexist comments). There were also ethical issues I had to address about safety. I was clearly the responsible adult (unlike some fieldworkers who adopt the role of the 'friend' to the point of adopting the "least adult role" (Mandell, 1988) and "being" a child (Holmes, 1998), a position which I find patronising and dishonest), so I could not allow them to leave the room or behave in ways which might compromise their safety. So how did I address these issues? Safety issues or issues of unkindness I would address as any other adult. I decided to feign ignorance of some of the school rules if safety was not affected,

and checked with the teachers that this was acceptable. I did not react to the occasional four-letter word, for example. Where pupils talked at the same time, I would point out that it would be difficult to transcribe from the recording. In common with many fieldworkers (Fine, 1987; Holmes, 1995), I asked the pupils to call me by my first name, though they occasionally lapsed into 'sir'. I also carefully considered what I should wear. If I was going straight on to a formal meeting elsewhere, I could not avoid suit and tie, but I made sure that for the first few meetings at least I was dressed smartly but casually, wearing for example jeans and a jumper.

There was, however, a potential contradiction in my persona. As I have said, I wanted them to view me as an ordinary person, an ex-pupil of their school. On the other hand, I wanted them to feel that their contributions were important, and therefore made clear to them that what they had to say was to be reported in various ways, including at a conference in Tokyo and in a book. This has, in fact, been suggested by Woods (1986: 67), who adds that "this 'media-person' image is one pupils generally seem to accept. If it is giving them a platform, a voice, the opportunity is something to be grasped". Of course, this was anything but ordinary in the lives of these pupils. The only strategy I could adopt to counteract any potential distancing effect was to emphasise the ordinary aspects of my life - my daughter's pantomime, cousins' jobs etc. Related to this was the 'middle-ground culture' (Measor and Woods, 1984) I was able to inhabit as a result of both my own background and the fact that I have a daughter of the same age, meaning that I could refer to certain aspects of the pupils' culture, including the places they go

to, the music they listen to etc. In a way, I was making an effort to 'connect' with them (what the sociolinguist Briggs (1986) called "knowing the local setting"), whilst at the same time being careful not to intrude on their territory or appear ridiculous.

Linked to this issue was my position as the 'audience'. What were the pupils using me for? As an advocate to make a point? To get their teachers into trouble? To try to get me to make changes? Potentially this could have led to exaggeration and distortion. I therefore had to constantly reaffirm that I had no power, that I did not know many of the teachers, that the research would be anonymous etc. Though it worried me, I also viewed any occurrence of this as positive, as it meant that the pupils felt empowered to use the research process for their own ends and could manipulate it accordingly. I was, in any case, prepared to (and indeed obliged to after my negotiations with the teachers) feed back to the teachers the negatives as well as the positives. I simply had to straddle boundaries, taking care to consider how "to speak for one group to another without becoming 'identified' as part of either" (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 99).

Finally, my role and its influence on the research needed itself to be interrogated by the research. I needed to find out how the pupils responded to me and if it was different from how they would respond to their teachers. This would allow me firstly to interpret the data, and secondly, to offer insights into how such meetings, should they prove worthwhile, might become part of school life.

4.5.5. Reliability and validity revisited

In Chapter Three I gave an overview of the ways in which I ensured levels of external and internal validity and reliability which were both appropriate and possible in each phase of the research. I will not repeat these here, though the substance can be found in the research design described in this chapter, e.g. analysis of my role in the research, description of methods of data collection and analysis. Here I will simply address some of the thornier issues relating to carrying out interviews with children, in particular focusing on strategies to clarify meaning.

Threats to the reliability and validity of interview data, with both adults and children, such as potential interviewer bias, the effects of the interviewer's personal characteristics on the interviewees, have been raised by many researchers (e.g. Burgess, 1982; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989). Specific issues related to interviews with children (3-8 year olds) have also been referred to in Lewis (1992: 416-7), such as susceptibility to leading questions by adult interviewers, occasional dishonesty, and language limitations; also lack of concentration, memory limitations, over-attention to certain perceptual features in the situation (Donaldson, 1987), or the desire always to give a response, no matter how nonsensical (Hughes and Grieve, 1980). Backett and Alexander (1991), in their research on young children's views of health-related issues, also raise this issue, referring to McGurk and Glachan's (1988) argument that children are too often expected to communicate within an adult frame of reference, and that this can lead to their spending effort trying to understand what the adult wants of them.

Although the pupils that I planned to work with were older and would be in groups, all of these issues remained a challenge, in particular the need for pupils and myself to understand each other's meaning, committed as I was to understanding the world from their perspective. I would need to be aware of the need to speak to children on their own terms, to build in processes of constantly checking that the children and I understood each other's use of the language, and to validate on an ongoing basis each other's interpretation of meanings (see also Mischler, 1986). This of course necessitated the creation of an atmosphere in which the pupils could ask questions, check what they were understanding, feel able to contribute without fear of 'getting the answer wrong', see the point of the discussion through a clear, yet open, structure, and be able to relate the discussion to their own worlds without inhibition. These built-in considerations were important therefore not only to encourage the pupils to voice their thoughts, but also for reasons of validity and reliability.

However, like Holstein and Gubrium (1995), I questioned the extent to which traditional, scientific understandings of reliability and validity are appropriate in a research context which recognises the active, ongoing construction of meaning by the pupils involved, and where they may adopt specific identities within the group e.g. naughty boy, political activist, clown (see also Kirk and Miller, 1986). This may well lead to inconsistencies (as indeed happened, for example, when in one meeting a pupil said that he did not want to learn languages but then in another that he did, just in a different way, as learning languages is useful). Holstein and

Gubrium call this "the dynamic features of narrative resources" and suggest that "it is as much a feature of the present as of the past", a "history-in-the-making" (cf Foucault, 1977).

Indeed, use of projective techniques where I would ask pupils to imagine something, such as being a language learner of the future or a teacher, was provoking such identity changes, such "positional shifts" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 33), in an attempt to stimulate their thinking. I believed that, even when playing a role, the pupils would reveal something about their constructions.

As I have said, I nevertheless planned a range of validating mechanisms into my research. Using a 'slimmed-down' version of Elliott's (1987) 'on-going dialogue' in which in the course of the six meetings I checked out my understandings in various ways in order to continually refine them:

a) Repetition of my interpretation of what they were saying immediately after points had been made, especially in cases of apparent inconsistency.
b) Clarification of meanings and use of words (e.g. if someone were to say that a good learner is someone who 'makes an effort', I would need to clarify what that person means by 'effort' rather than making assumptions by responding with "you mean a hard worker then?")
c) Use of summary questions/statements at the end of the meeting.
d) Summarising the previous meeting(s) as part of the introduction.

e) Revisiting the same questions from different angles and at different times throughout the research (ensuring that pupils are told why I was doing this).

These strategies also offered an alternative form of triangulation. Clearly I did not plan to check the 'accuracy' of what the pupils were saying by asking teachers or observing behaviours, and in any case, my assumption was that any construction expressed, even if contradictory, represented a 'voice', a form of knowledge or knowledge under construction. Nevertheless it was useful to revisit, clarify etc. It is, in fact, the possibility of such clarification which offers focus groups "high face validity", according to Krueger (1994: 35). It also compensated for the fact that I was unable to impose written transcript and analysis checks on the children.

4.5.6. Access issues

In any school-based research it is important to minimise any disruption to the school. In doctoral research I was particularly sensitive to the fact that I had asked the school for access rather than being commissioned by the school to carry out research.

This section will deal with gaining access at the level of the teachers. However, it is also important to point out that access issues also involve access to the pupils themselves, not only in terms of their initial perceptions of the rationale behind and importance of the research, but also in terms of sustaining this access. If the pupils did not feel the interviews to be relevant, enjoyable and important

throughout the series of meetings, or if they believed that their voices were not being heard, they would simply stop coming. However, this is covered elsewhere in this thesis.

4.5.6.1. *Meeting with Domain*

Several months after my first meeting, I attended another departmental meeting to present my identified research focus and to address a number of practical issues. I did not take along a written document as I felt that there still had to be room for negotiation and I did not want the teachers to feel that everything was already decided. I wrote the notes up later together with a record of the decisions taken.

The meeting was again successful. The teachers seemed to be enthusiastic about the research focus which I was able to articulate clearly. (I noted this in my research journal as I was still constantly looking for evidence that I knew what I was doing, a further example of use of journal as therapy.) A major step forward was their agreement to my using language lesson time to speak to students (though this was possibly related to the opportunity to offload some 'difficult' students!). In fact, my desire to include these pupils made quite an impression, seeming to reaffirm that I was interested in 'real' children and 'real' situations and therefore that my research was worthwhile. It was indeed referred to, rather proudly I thought, by the Head of Department towards the end of my research when he was speaking at an ALL CPD session.

Other practical issues negotiated at this meeting were as follows, which is a verbatim extract from the written account I gave to them:

Outcomes of meeting with Languages Department

1. Selection of pupils to be organised by Languages teachers according to agreed criteria. (Teachers want mixture of French and German students.)

2. Pupils may be withdrawn from some languages lessons (Thursday afternoon good, also Tuesday period 5, Friday period 6; Monday morning is a possibility). Some groups may agree to meet in lunchtimes.

3. Room 19 can be used. Audio recording equipment can be provided by the school. Possibility of video equipment to be discussed with Keith.

4. Access to pupils to be checked with Keith. Letters to be sent home to parents explaining the purposes of the research and asking permission. Information to be added to Records of Achievement.

5. Department agrees commitment to seriously consider research outcomes - important reassurance that pupils' 'voices' will be heard.

I was pleased with these outcomes. I had been worried that my research agenda may be compromised in the negotiations, but in fact this was not the case. I suspected that teachers were over-optimistic about what might emerge. Their reason for wanting boys and girls to be included in equal numbers stemmed from a wish to understand gender differences, when in fact it would be impossible to generalise in this way. Similarly, they were very keen to include both French and German which of course would have implications for my analysis, albeit implications which I was happy to take on board. I accepted these terms gladly,

since it meant that the teachers gave me their cooperation. I did, however, for ethical reasons, ensure that no promises were made to find answers to everything.

I promised to give feedback on progress whenever they wanted. Obviously their departmental meeting time was precious, but they were interested in occasional bulletins. In fact I did not attend many meetings in this way, though I gave informal feedback every time I met a teacher during my visits. I did insist on meeting new teachers at a departmental meeting early in the following academic year, to explain what I was doing and answer questions, and used this opportunity to feed back the interim analysis which I had presented at the AILA conference in Tokyo.

4.5.6.2. *Additional communications*

A week later I went into the school again to take in my research outline and the record of decisions taken as mentioned above. This was accepted by the teachers as an accurate record of the agreements. Teachers had not yet selected the pupils for the focused group conversations as they had been busy covering for the illness of Erika's successor. Although disappointed, I recognised that this was one of the difficulties with school-based research. Despite the commitment and interest of the teachers, other issues in the day-to-day running of the school have to take precedence.

I also discussed with Bill the logistics of using some lunchtimes for my meetings if the pupils agreed. He suggested that some pupils would be glad to come to avoid

having to go outside. In order to give us enough time over lunchtime, Bill agreed to sign lunch passes to allow pupils into lunch early. I was pleased with this as it offered them an incentive without it seeming that I wielded power. I promised to make the lunch passes myself (see Appendix 9). I also asked Bill to introduce me to the Maths teacher since his lesson followed lunchtime on the days in question, and I wanted to inform him personally that I was working with the pupils at lunchtimes in case they were slightly delayed. He said that this was not a problem at all. Once again, I was aware of the importance of keeping the goodwill of the staff by causing as little disruption as possible.

During this visit I also had a meeting with the Deputy Head, Keith. I described the research to him after giving him a copy of the written description, and he was happy with it. He believed that the pupils would be interested, curious and eager to 'have their say'. Clearly it addressed the needs of the school. He also approved the letter to parents I showed him (see Appendix 10) and agreed that I could use the school's video recording equipment provided that I booked it in advance.

I then made myself known to the staff in the resources office. They also agreed to my using the equipment, though I decided that audio equipment would be more easily accessible if borrowed from the languages department. I used this opportunity to clarify that there was a tripod so that I could switch on and forget about the video camera. Video- and audio-tapes could be bought from them.

Prior to the first focused group conversation, I circulated a timetable of interviews to all language teachers as well as to the pupils involved.

Soon afterwards, I was asked to write a short article for the school's newsletter to inform both staff and parents of progress.

4.5.7. Considering the environment and the atmosphere

I would be using Room 19 for the conversations, which pleased me as it was a small room next to the library rather than a large classroom. Although I was told that in theory the room may be needed for special needs work, this never happened. I took the precaution of posting the timetable of when I was using the room on the staffroom notice board in order to ensure that everyone knew and could inform me if they needed the room on those occasions. I did not want to step on toes, but neither did I want to arrive at the school before a meeting to find that the room was unavailable.

The size of the room helped me to create an atmosphere slightly different from that of the ordinary classroom, especially after I had rearranged the chairs and tables to accommodate the video camera. Pupils would sit in a horseshoe formation but behind desks and with the focus towards the back of the classroom rather than towards the board (unless some brainstorming activity was being carried out). I originally planned not to use desks but decided that they would be useful when pupils were writing and may also help pupils feel less self-conscious, a possibility also picked up by Krueger (1994: 48). The arrangement offered good eye contact

between the group and me, and between the pupils themselves, which was vital for communication and for my awareness of whether they were understanding, wanting to contribute etc.

Unfortunately, when the pupils moved into Y10, I was unable to negotiate continued use of Room 19, so meetings occurred in an ordinary classroom. However, having already established relaxed working relationships, I did not feel overly concerned about this. Nevertheless, I paid attention to the environment, this time using the back corner of the classroom nearest the window, with the focus towards the corner. Any brainstorming activities were done using flipchart paper so that pupils did not have to look towards the classroom. For these meetings I did decide to dispense with desks: I hoped that pupils felt comfortable by now anyway, and I thought it would help to change the classroom atmosphere further.

With regard to recording the conversations, I faced a dilemma. On the one hand I did not want pupils to feel embarrassed by the obtrusive use of audio or, particularly, video recorders. On the other hand, as I was committed to an accurate recording of their voices. I did not wish to risk misinterpreting what was being said during or immediately after the meetings. Nor did I feel able to take notes during the discussions for various reasons: firstly I wanted to give the pupils my full attention; secondly, I wished to concentrate on what I was saying and how I was saying it, in order to remain as critical as possible about my potential influence; thirdly, I thought that constant note-taking would be more off-putting for the pupils, as they would be aware of what I was choosing to note down. Even

if I could have had a second researcher in the room to record what was happening, I would have chosen not to.

I decided to use both audio and video recorders to enable me to be clear about who was saying what, to allow me to look at the body language of the pupils, and to offer backup in case one medium failed or was unclear (as indeed happened several times). Despite Lewis's (1992: 419) suggestion that "if the focus is on group norms, and this is the underlying purpose of the research, then it may be unnecessary to try to disentangle individual identities on the tape", I felt uncomfortable about dismissing the importance of individual personalities when listening to voices. My research also offered potential for identifying changing views, interrelationships, at an individual level if necessary. Ideally I might have planned to put the video cameras in some kind of gallery (as did Gilbert and Pope (1983) for example) to encourage the pupils to forget about them, but this was impossible in a school and, on reflection, may have been deceptive to them. At least with it in view they would know when it was on, and there would be less chance of them finding the process suspicious. I did ask their permission to video, and reassured them that no one else would see or hear them apart from possibly someone who might help me to transcribe them. I had to promise this would not be my wife (and indeed I kept reassuring them about this throughout the whole process, even telling them that whenever my wife had asked to see or hear bits I had refused to let her).

One area where I had little control was that of acoustics and recording quality. Classrooms tend to be uncarpeted, echo a lot, and pick up sound from outside the classroom, especially at lunchtimes. Such problems were encountered also by Watts and Ebbutt (1987: 29), and eventually they decided to use several directional microphones to improve their "diffuse, 'clouded' and indistinct recordings". However I did not really have that option. I was obliged to use the school's equipment, which was variable in quality, though I eventually got to know which cassette recorders were the best (those from the resource centre rather than those in the languages department). Despite testing the quality of recording before each meeting, I was often disappointed by the quality in the end.

4.5.8. Ethical considerations

I have made reference to ethical considerations where appropriate throughout the research descriptions and will not draw them all together here. I will simply focus on one particular issue which was central throughout the research, namely the possibility of risks to the participants. This always needs to be addressed, but it takes on an extra dimension with younger participants (Sieber and Sieber, 1992). I had to consider whether there might be risks both during the research period and afterwards. Although a major source of risk (experimentation) was not part of my research, I addressed potential vulnerability in various ways: I was open and honest about the nature of the research from the start, including my own position; I obtained the consent of both the pupils themselves and their parents; I ensured that the research was confidential, preserving anonymity; I was assured of the good will of the school and teachers and their readiness to accept criticism; I did all I

could to avoid misrepresentation. My first loyalty was to the pupils and then the teachers; in other words, even though at times my research would have benefited from more frequent access, or access to all pupils in a group, I had to be prepared to accept that I could not make excessive demands, in the meetings or outside them. I also recognised that there would be occasions where last minute changes of plan in the interests of the pupils (e.g. preparations for a test), might mean that I would have to cancel meetings on arrival at the school, or would have to be satisfied with a smaller number attending.

4.6. CONCLUSION

> "In the end, the best an interviewer can hope for is insight into the respondent's favourite self-image" (Powney and Watts, 1987: 193).

By this stage, I believed I had done everything possible to offer the pupils an environment which would support them in finding their voice. These voices may appear as oral accounts conforming to a particular Discourse (see Gee's discussion of Discourse, 1996: 131-132), revealing what is 'allowed' to be said in that particular community (Block, 1997), but this is validated by the assumption that all knowledge is situated and learned, and, for some more than others, restricted. What I needed to be aware of was the probability that what was being articulated did not constitute the full extent of the pupils' constructions. Such potential limitations therefore needed to be recognised in the analysis, which would reflect the context of what was being said and "take account of the way each respondent tries to present a particular image" (Powney and Watts, 1987: 45).

5. PUPILS' VOICES SPEAKING: MEETING THE GROUPS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Powney and Watts (1987) have written about the notion of congruence in research. I have at various points in this thesis described particular research commitments, which largely involve understanding the issues under investigation from the diverse perspectives of the pupils themselves in their specific context, recognising their expertise, and considering the implications for the languages curriculum. Congruence implies that "the analysis of data should be consistent or compatible with the general underlying philosophy of the research" (Powney and Watts, 1987: 158). For this reason, this chapter will privilege the voices of the pupils, and will avoid the distraction of references to other 'expert' texts in the body of the analysis. I have no desire to compare what the pupils say with what others have said at this stage. I have also already taken enough space away from these voices in order to justify my research focus.

Although I intend to keep these introductory sections as brief as possible, a few points need to be made. One is that I am taking a hermeneutic approach, with a concern for "interpreting and recounting accurately the meanings which research participants give to the reality around them" (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 31). At the same time, it cannot be denied that analysis is "a creative, constructive affair and is not simply an act of isolating and describing something that might be considered self-evident" (Powney and Watts, 1987: 160). As such, my own voice will show through, and the analysis therefore

needs to be read carefully in the light of my own autobiography and commitments.

In this analysis, I will attempt to convey the flavour of the whole series of meetings. I shall try to tell the story, conveying the complexity of the groups and the individuals. I must say, however, with all honesty, that the voices of these children were far richer than I could ever have imagined, and that, unfortunately, I have had to make difficult decisions about what to include and what to leave out. I have collected some data which cannot be used in this analysis. This is an ethical issue, though I am able to justify it on three grounds: firstly, some of the interactions were designed primarily to create an atmosphere in which the pupils felt comfortable and safe enough to express their voices, and which would support them in articulating difficult constructions; secondly, full transcriptions are available to those who wish to read them; and thirdly, the reporting of this data is not limited to this thesis, as it has been fed back to the school, presented to teachers in other schools, presented to researchers and teachers in national and international conferences as well as through publications, used as a resource for my teaching sessions with PGCE students as well as to inform policy makers at local and national levels. And my pupils continue to speak, as further publications and presentations are being prepared.

What is important is that the researcher is honest about what is being reported. S/he cannot report everything, nor should s/he attempt to, so it is important not to pretend to. This means that the analysis does have to be focused. Initially I

found these ideas problematic, as they related to my earlier concern about open and closed research design. As I came to terms with this concern, however, I found the related issue of analysis easier to contend with. In any case, my intention was to reflect constantly and critically in order to monitor the honesty of the representation.

This chapter begins by describing the process of analysis, before moving onto the analysis itself. This will be reported in three main sections, which will also contain intermittent reflections and summaries. Following this, there will be an evaluation of the research methods themselves, and attempts to draw together all of the strands both within and across groups in order to respond to the overall research questions.

5.2. OVERALL DESIGN OF THE ANALYSIS

Krueger (1984: 142) states that the purpose of the research should drive the analysis, otherwise the data will be weak. The implication is that all data is heavy with theory, as it has been generated from questions which have originated in theory. I have already written that I could not afford weak data because of efficiency needs, so the meetings were designed around the research questions, and the analysis takes the same focus. This primarily involves an exploration of the relationships between the learners' constructions of language learning and specific motivational beliefs identified as relevant to the research focus, i.e. beliefs about the learner's control or influence over learning, and beliefs about the content and purpose of language learning and its connections

to their lives. Though some flexibility is maintained, each aspect of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs is analysed with a main focus as follows:

Person knowledge/beliefs:	where control over learning is located, and to whom constraints on that control are attributed
Task knowledge/beliefs (general):	how language learning relates to the learners, both generally and specifically in terms of their experience in the school
Task Knowledge/beliefs (specific):	how understandings of individual learning tasks may inform choice and contribute to learner control of learning
Strategic knowledge/beliefs:	relationships with learners' constructions of control over learning

5.3. WORKING WITH MY DATA

5.3.1. Transcriptions

I had to decide which form the data was going to take. I had decided to record the conversations as I needed an unmediated record of learners' voices. I had also decided not to take notes during these conversations (though I would have found it very useful on occasions). In order to extract the data, then, I had a number of alternatives: full transcriptions, partial transcriptions (such as those suggested by Woods (1985) as part of his two-stage transcription process) and notes taken whilst viewing the videos. I decided to transcribe fully, the most time-consuming but thorough strategy. My commitment to voice meant that I

wanted to use the pupils' own words as far as possible, so this was not the time for shortcuts. Of course I would analyse the data in my own language, but I wanted to be able to support this with verbatim comments both as a way of ensuring that the voices were heard directly and as evidence of the rigour and validity of my research. I also decided that these voices should be transcribed as far as possible in their dialect form, since this is a vital part of their identity. As the process progressed, however, I started to cut corners, but only in my own contributions: I did not transcribe longer introductions to activities, even though I was aware that these may be important as a way of checking that I had not 'led' the group (Powney and Watts, 1987: 76). In recognition of this, I did transcribe shorter introductions and all questions.

Transcription itself, however, is not without its problems. It can be argued that it is but one way of reading what went on. As the text becomes the raw material of the analysis, it takes on its own meaning and may be afforded more status than it deserves; for example, throwaway lines can be taken too seriously. In order to attempt to counteract this, we first need to recognise it, then consider the ethical principles we are going to follow when using the transcription in order to avoid it. On an ontological level, we need to be clear that we are involved in the *representation* of learners' meanings, which aims for accuracy but does not necessarily achieve it. On a more practical level, we can ensure that we use as much non-verbal data as possible in the analysis, which of course is more possible in video than audio recordings (Bentley, in Powney and Watts, 1987: 94-100).

I therefore did the transcriptions myself. I wanted them to be accurate, I wanted them to be detailed. I must admit to paying a secretary to transcribe some of the conversations (from the audio cassettes), but ended up doing them again myself as the secretary left gaps where she could not understand what was being said (because of poor quality, interruptions, or local dialect issues), occasionally inventing what she thought was being said. She also corrected the pupils' English with the result that my inner city Northern children appeared as residents of middle England! (Similarly, Ebbutt (in Powney and Watts, 1987: 105) describes how their audio-typist produced transcriptions which were so loosely related to the actual interviews that they had to be re-done.)

5.3.2. Data protection

Careful protection of my data was essential. Immediately after an interview I would label the audiocassette with the group's name, the meeting number, date and time. I would then take the video recording to Resources for transfer onto a videocassette. This was the only time where I handed over control of the recorded data to someone else, and it was at this point that data was occasionally lost. On two occasions only part of the recording was transferred to cassette, and on another occasion a recording was lost completely. This is understandable given how busy the Resources department was, and the low priority my research had in comparison with their ordinary responsibilities, but it is a useful reminder of how important it is to protect data. Fortunately, I still had my audio recordings to fall back on.

5.3.3. How to report?

Watts and Ebbutt (1987) discuss how to report the outcomes of the research in the analysis. Issues to reflect on include use of individual comments and quotes (of course maintaining anonymity), representation, etc:

> "Does one, for example, try to represent the views of everyone present? To include a quote from every individual? Or to attempt a balance in terms of the number of major ideas or opinions being proffered?" (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987: 31)

As I have said, my research agenda required me to represent the pupils' voices directly so that they could speak for themselves. Of course I had to select and interpret them myself, but I took pains to ensure that I did not omit anything which contradicted the point I was making. I also tried to select and attribute quotes in ways which indicated the similarities and differences in views. Nevertheless, the copious use of direct quotes allows the reader to read into them whatever s/he wishes, as would be the case in a conversation. Though the story is constructed by me, I need not necessarily come between the pupils and the reader. My intention was not to speak *for* but *with* the pupils.

Finally, I had to make a decision whether to report each conversation separately or to develop thematic sections. I decided on the latter as each conversation not only had a particular focus (such as Person Knowledge), but, for reasons already explained, also included other aspects. Person Knowledge, therefore, though drawing largely from FGC2 also includes data from other conversations, in particular FGC6. Some groups of conversations are not reported discretely at all; FGC6 largely revisits the other foci, deepening and broadening them; FGC3 (Task Knowledge 1: General) focuses partly on constructions of languages as a subject, offering insights into motivations and

thus feeding into the background information on the groups; it is also partly focused on language learning in this particular school, and as such contributes to the section on strategic knowledge. For this reason, any quote will indicate the particular focused group conversation (FGC) from which it is taken.

5.3.4. The formal process of analysis

Formal analysis needs to be systematic. As Yin (1984: 99) writes:

> "Data analysis consists of examining, categorising, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence, to address the initial propositions of a study".

I therefore planned a coding process, beginning with a review of the research questions and a general scan of the data with my analytical foci in mind, noting striking general features and emerging questions (what LeCompte and Preissle (1993: 236) call the beginnings of a 'dialogue' with the data). I then followed the following stages:

Stage 1: I sorted the raw data into the broad categories of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs (as above), using all the data available from all of the conversations, including data produced in written form.

Stage 2: I sorted into sub-categories, checking constantly that the categories were appropriate. I noted where there was agreement or disagreement, where a response was immediate or a result of interaction, how intense the response was, what else might have influenced the comments (atmosphere, previous incidents, familiarity with me over time), all the time checking for any contradictory evidence (though inconsistency of comments and changes of

mind are normal occurrences in life and would, where noticed in the course of the discussions, have been probed to find out what had prompted them). I also noted which responses were based on specific experiences and which ones on hypothetical situations (which led to an early distinction between knowledge and beliefs). This process is similar to the constant comparison method of qualitative analysis first used by Glaser and Strauss (1967), involving a constant to-ing and fro-ing between the emerging categories and the data.

Throughout this stage, my transcripts and notes were marked with symbols, numbers and letters, these codes becoming increasingly complex as the various sub-categories emerged.

Stage 3: I looked at the categories and data contained within them in terms of the analytical constructs, and sorted them, occasionally shifting data between categories and sub-categories.

Stage 4: I summarised the data, taking care not to lose its richness, selecting the most appropriate quotes from the transcriptions. (Although it would have been ideal to be able to return to the groups at this stage, this was not possible; instead, ongoing informal analyses were referred to in successive meetings, either directly or as part of an activity or question.)

Stage 5: I looked for differences and similarities between the different groups.

Stage 6: I interpreted the data in order to make sense of it, including further analyses in order to address additional aspects relevant to my questions and research commitments.

Stage 7: I produced an overview of the data as a whole, which enabled me to look at relationships between the different categories, and which led me to revisiting the data as necessary in order to clarify issues and questions.

5.4. THE ANALYSIS: PREFACE

I arrived very early on my first day, as I wanted to set up before registration. I was aware of the importance of these first conversations for gaining 'access' to the groups, and earning respect for the project and was anxious, despite my careful reflection on my role. Significant issues such as body language (smiling, head-nodding, overt displays of listening behaviours etc) and paralanguage (speed of speech, tone, volume etc) were crucial (Bentley, in Powney and Watts, 1987: 97), and would help to create a 'positive affect' (Argyle, 1969). However, these would have to happen spontaneously, and could potentially misfire.

I would also have to remember all of the other aspects of my role: reassuring them that there were no right or wrong answers; maintaining this by remembering not to 'correct' their contributions, or praise 'pleasing' answers. I would also have to remember to build up their confidence to participate, and this would involve some praise for having ideas of any kind, pointing out that they were all of interest to my research. I would have to observe them

carefully, trying to include those who remained silent, watching out for signs of boredom or unease, and ensuring that they were able to contribute when they wished to. All of this would be demanding.

As I began my first conversations, however, I started to relax. Though I had to concentrate, and maintain a constantly critical awareness of my own behaviours, I quickly realised that my experiences as a teacher had prepared me well for this. This realisation was constantly reinforced throughout my time with these children.

The following section will introduce the groups. In common with the rest of the analyses, I shall not be describing in detail the rationale underpinning each of the questions or stimuli, as this would take up too much space. The general orientation of each conversation has, however, been described already, and will be briefly revisited as part of each of the introductions to the sections.

5.5. INTRODUCING THE GROUPS

The main aim of the first conversation was to inform the pupils about the research and their role in it, to negotiate appropriate working relationships, to get to know them, and to begin to understand their perceptions of their education. This would at this stage include general constructions in order to be able to locate language learning more specifically within them, so we would also discuss school and school subjects in general.

For this meeting I designed a sheet which would provide some background information on the pupils (see Appendix 2). I also intended this sheet to give me some sense of their motivation to learn languages in comparison with other subjects and therefore asked them to list their subjects firstly according to preference (from most favourite to least favourite), then according to usefulness. There were also spaces for them to explain why they were placing the subjects accordingly, if they so wished. The sheet then asked them briefly to indicate what their personal ambitions were as well as what their parents would like them to do in the future. This was intended to give some background to their social aspirations. Finally, the sheet asked for a general comment about their school (whether they like it or not, plus reasons) and their favourite teacher (including what it is that makes him/her so special).

The idea here was not to develop a questionnaire which could be analysed quantitatively, but simply to offer some background information to offer further contextualisation and to supplement data from the conversations. It was filled in informally, and I was able to explain what to do as they filled it in. For example, the pupils were told not to worry about justifying all of their subjects in the ranking questions, since this would be difficult.

The data reported in this section will draw mainly on the first set of focused group conversations, including the questionnaires, though it will also include data from all other conversations, as introductory questions were often used to get to know more about the pupils. The data is reported in three sections:

1. Background information, including notes on the atmosphere in the conversations
2. General perceptions of school, including more focused comments on their own school
3. Motivation for language learning compared with other subjects

Some issues touched upon here are explored more fully later in the appropriate sections, e.g. perceptions of the teacher.

5.5.1. Introducing the groups: 9A1

5.5.1.1. *Background*

9A1 consisted of six pupils learning languages in the lower half of Y9. They had been placed in these groups according to their achievements in National Curriculum levels in Y8. Helen, Nadia and Louis were all learning French, whereas Peter, Carol and Carl were learning German.

The pupils enjoyed a range of out-of school activities, mostly of a sporting nature such as watching and playing football, swimming, dancing and trampolining. Their ideas for future occupations included joining the army or the police, working as a receptionist, veterinary nurse, nursery teacher, PE teacher, professional footballer, and dancing teacher. These ambitions were confirmed in the fourth conversation when pupils were asked to talk about where they saw themselves in ten years. In particular, Helen (dancing teacher) and Carl (police) had a clear idea of what these jobs entail, based on people they knew. Furthermore, pupils appeared to have these ideas without

interference from their parents; most of them reported that their parents were happy for them to do whatever they chose.

In the third meeting I asked the pupils where they go on holiday. The intention was to get a feel for the extent to which they travelled, especially with regard to the countries in which the language they were learning is spoken. Mostly pupils went to the usual destinations of Northern working class families: Blackpool, Skegness, Paignton and Majorca, though Carl told the group he had been to Turkey. Carol was the only person who had been on a school trip (to Austria), though Louis was going to France in the summer, and the others said they would like to some day. By the time we met for FGC5 eight months later, Carl had been on a school football trip to Belgium, though the other pupils could not imagine taking part in an exchange. For example:

> Helen: My house might not be good enough. You can't relax or anything, you can't act yourself and that. You have to spend all t'time with them and I couldn't cope with that. (10A1FGC5)

The videotapes, as well as notes in my research journal on the atmosphere in the conversations with this group, serve as a reminder that it was an easy group to work with. Generally, they were helpful and took the meetings seriously. A little shy at first, and occasionally nervous when the group was smaller (in FGC2, for example, when two pupils were absent), they were nevertheless willing to contribute, and did so with humour.

5.5.1.2. *General perceptions of school*

All pupils wrote that they liked school. Most of them stressed its social aspects, though there was also evidence that they enjoyed lessons. Louis suggested that

school was necessary for getting a job. One response which encompassed most of the others was Carol's:

> "You get to see your friends, you have fun while you learn, it stops you from being bored, it is only 6 hours a day." (9A1FGC1)

When asked to rank their school subjects (from 1 to 9) and give reasons, insights were offered into the criteria they used to evaluate their lessons. The first category concerned how much they liked the subjects, and reasons offered included a strong focus on practical aspects of learning (experiments, painting, using tools). Other criteria included the way it is taught (e.g. variety, fun, interesting, sense of learning), the teacher (mentioned only once), and its usefulness for the future. This latter point was expanded in the following question (how useful the subjects may be), where subjects with perceived broader application were generally rated higher (Maths and English, for example), and those which were perceived as relevant only to those wanting to work in the field came lower (apart from those pupils wanting to use this subject). Interestingly, many pupils commented on the intrinsic value of the subject, but with more emphasis on the practical application ('know how to' e.g. draw, add up, use a map, measure, cut wood) than on the knowledge itself ('know about' e.g. different religions, the world). Carol, for example, put science in third position, saying "I will need to know some science for if there is a fire or something." (9A1FGC1)

Some pupils rated a subject according to their own goals, e.g. Louis placed French in fourth position because he was going to France in the summer.

Reasons for not liking a subject included being boring, unimportant, difficult, or involving too much writing. The teacher was again only mentioned once as a reason.

The pupils were generally positive about school. When asked what was good about it, they commented mainly on the facilities (library, mobile classrooms, toilets, public phone, sports hall, football team), though Helen also mentioned the people in the school. When asked about the negative aspects, they covered aspects such as start and finish time, too many lessons per day, teacher discipline, uniform, assemblies, food etc. When asked what they would change if they could only change one thing, the main suggestion concerned the number and personal relevance of subjects studied (e.g. limiting them to two subjects, including PE (Carl), "looking after a baby" and hairdressing (Carol), driving lessons (Peter), basically "whatever you feel like that you're going to need...cos there's no point doing anything if it's not going to be really useful to you" (Helen)).

5.5.1.3. *Motivation for language learning compared with other subjects*

These pupils had all been identified by their teachers, Mrs Jones (French) and Mrs Bacon (German), as motivated. According to the questionnaire rankings, however, this was not immediately apparent, with languages averaging out as fifth out of nine in both categories, though the average was brought down by Peter who placed German ninth. On closer examination, though, it could be seen that the ranking was largely due to the pupils' generally positive perceptions of school; they simply liked other subjects more or found them

more useful. Lower rankings seemed in all cases apart from Peter's to be affected by perceived difficulties with the languages. Nadia (placing French eighth in her list of likes) wrote "I like French but I can't get the hang of talking like it", and Carl (placing German sixth in this category) wrote "German is good but I sometimes get stuck with words."

IN FGC3 a month later, all pupils (including Peter) confirmed that they did like languages, though Peter suggested that it is sometimes "boring" and difficult. In the final conversation (FGC6) almost a year after the first conversation, when pupils were asked to assess on a scale of 1 to 4 how much they enjoy and how much they want to learn languages (i.e. not in comparison to other subjects), with 1 being 'a lot' and 4 being 'not at all', Carl, Helen, Carol and Louis rated both between 1 and 2, though Nadia (3.5 and 2.5) and Peter (3.5 and 2.5) enjoyed them less (though in both cases were more positive about wanting to learn them). Discussing this, Peter in fact confirmed that the lower score was related to perceived level of difficulty ("I understand other subjects more"). (See FGC6 protocol, Appendix 8)

Generally speaking then, this group may be perceived as having a positive attitude to languages, though no one would claim it as their favourite subject. When they are compared with the other pupils from their classes (in 9A2), however, it is easy to understand why their teachers perceived them as motivated.

5.5.2. Introducing the groups: 9A2

5.5.2.1. *Background*

9A2 marked a significant contrast with 9A1. Also consisting of six pupils taken from the same lower half classes as 9A1, these had been identified by their teachers as unmotivated. Luke, Candice and Darren were all learning French, whereas James, Penny and Katy were learning German.

From the beginning it was difficult to get straightforward information from the group. When asked about their out-of school activities, for example, Luke spoke about playing computer games, but others talked about "hanging about in the streets", "clocking" (James's contribution, defined for me by Penny as stealing cars), "smoking skunk", "having a laugh with mates", drinking in the park, and going to nightclubs. How much of this was actually the case cannot be determined, but it certainly gives an idea of the impression the pupils were trying to make, both to me and to each other. When filling in their questionnaires, pupils offered a more stable picture of their ambitions, including two hairdressers, an engineer, a 400metre runner (Luke), and "dealing weed and scunk (sic)" (from James again, though he did state in the conversation that he wanted to be a footballer). By the fourth conversation, only Candice had stuck to her original ambition (hairdresser), though it was difficult to get any further responses about this from any of the other pupils (apart from Penny, who announced that she wanted to "listen to music and stay in bed, and smoke and drink"). In response to the question regarding their parents' ambitions for them, most wrote that they wanted whatever would be best for them.

When asked about their holiday destinations, Penny and Candice mentioned America (Miami), and there were references to Spain, Skegness and Chapel St Leonards. None of these pupils had been on a school trip abroad, and Penny and Candice were disparaging about the cost of these trips ("a bit of a rip off").

The conversations with 9A2 were infuriating but fascinating. An atmosphere of chaos often reigned, which can best be depicted through some extracts from the transcripts:

> (I hand out the timetables. I explain that there may be a lunchtime meeting, but some are talking. [...] Some fussing with James trying to get Penny's pen. Katy keen to underline all of her dates - even today's. Penny continuing to write, James interested in her pen which is shaped like a hypodermic syringe. I continue to explain the topic for today - "How you think about what you're doing when you're learning, how you talk about yourself and how you personally try to learn something." - James interrupts to point out "Sir, Sir look I've brought a needle in". I already feel that my questions are inappropriate!) (FGC2)
>
> Katy: (to James) You're supposed to be here to listen.
>
> James: Shurrup Katy.
>
> T: (I explain that it's not so much to listen as to talk but that means they have to listen. Whilst I am saying this Katy is carrying on at James, yet picking up on what I'm saying and commenting on it to James.) (9A2FGC2)

Later in that conversation, I sum up the pupils' behaviour:

> (They are so excitable and hard to follow. Candice waves her arms around. Luke makes dry comments when you don't know if he's being serious or not. James is hypersensitive, Darren says things that are irrelevant at that time, but finds them amusing, Katy is always scribbling. Penny loves giving her opinions.) (9A2FG2)

In fact, Katy was not seen again after this meeting due to her regular truancy.

FGC4 had a very different atmosphere, and I noted that it was difficult to get the pupils to speak, though they did eventually warm up. I wrote the following observation after the conversation:

> Monday a.m. – very lethargic! Could hardly get them going. Said it was because it was Monday – I should see them Thursday. Never noticed it could be so important! Bill told me afterwards that he'd just "given them a bollocking" for making Nazi salutes at Gerda".

By Y10, James was no longer learning German (or History), and spent his lessons colouring in pictures in the library (though he did come along to the fifth meeting which took place in December of Y10). After FGC5, I wrote the following reflection:

> In school today for 10A2. Four were there plus James who no longer does German or History. Luke and Darren were as uncommunicative as ever. James played with his mobile (very difficult not to fall into the teacher role, especially as it makes it hard to record!). Penny seemed more mature but no less cynical. Candice, surprisingly, was all over the place - hyperactive, talkative, no concentration.

Having described the group in this way, it is important to state that in fact they did share valuable knowledge and opinions. This was the only group, for example, to make serious points about racism:

> Candice: I'm not being racist or anything but you know these youth clubs for coloured people they just get wrecked for us but they get wrecked for them but I don't think it's right. I think it should be just all one club.
>
> James: No, because that's how they make riots.
>
> Katy: You'd just get all fighting.
>
> Candice: I think they should all just get on.

> James: Coloureds and whites against each other, it's just like an argument isn't it?
>
> Penny: There's always going to be someone racist isn't there?
>
> Candice: I don't agree with racists at all. I think they should all be friends. Cos there's no point in us all living in the same country ...(9A2FGC1)

Reflecting in my research journal, I noted that the group seemed to communicate in a different way. Though it was difficult to keep the pupils on track, and conversations were full of interruptions, I realised that they in fact were communicating their constructions, and that they had quite consistent belief systems. This will emerge throughout the analysis, and it made me think about how understandable it is that teachers become infuriated, yet also how frustrating it is for the pupils who are in fact expressing themselves in ways which the teacher cannot understand. This group reminded me of Willis's (1977) 'lads' in many ways.

So often did I feel that I was simply asking the wrong questions, that what I perceived as relevant was irrelevant to the pupils, that they had different priorities. As such, the group offered invaluable data within this research context.

5.5.2.2. *General perceptions of school*

Unlike 9A1, none of the pupils in 9A2 wrote that they liked school, describing it as "too long", "crap", and involving "writing all day". They appeared to judge their favourite lessons on the basis of "having a laugh" or practical applicability (cooking, drawing, acting, keeping fit). Usefulness was mainly

related to specific jobs, or on a general level (Luke placed English third, because you need to 'read and wright (sic)'). This was reinforced in the conversation when pupils suggested that new subjects should be introduced such as "travel agents" and hairdressing. In FGC4, Candice suggests that school "should prepare you for all sorts of things...like being a mum and being a housewife and stuff like that".

Reasons for not liking a subject encompassed boredom, too much writing, getting into trouble, and inability to understand. Only Katy was able to think of a favourite teacher, and the reason was that 'he does not shout at you'. However, Penny did ask "Can you put that you don't like it cos the teacher doesn't like you?" (9A2FGC1).

In FGC1, pupils identified sports, trips, food, 'some teachers' and the fact that they could borrow money from the office as positive features of the school. Luke could think of nothing. When asked about the negative aspects, there was a major focus on the environment:

> Luke: It's falling to bits. T'sports hall's...??
>
> Penny: The floors are loppy. T'floors are horrible, right dirty.
>
> James: It's a dustbin here. Lots of rubbish. (9A2FGC1)

Many comments seemed to concern a desire to protect their personal space, such being allowed to go to the toilet in lessons, to swear and smoke, to have lockable lockers, not to have to wear school uniform or do homework:

> Penny: There's no point. [...] you shouldn't have to do it after school. It's our time that. That's why I don't do my homework. It's not fair that. (9A2FGC2)

They felt particularly strongly that they should not be made to have a shower after PE, choosing this as their priority for change.

This issue of private space also included the belief that teachers interfere too much in their lives outside the school:

> Penny: Say you have a fight with somebody when it's not school time, on a Sunday or something, it's reported back to school and you still get done even though it's not in school time...
>
> [...]
>
> Katy: They stress you out. (shouting starts up again)
>
> James: Teachers shouldn't interfere, interfere with what you're doing.
>
> Penny: With your business
>
> James: Like drawing on stuff and smoking. (9A2FGC1)

This conversation eventually leads to a clear sense of the conflict between home and school, in which comprehension and communication has broken down on both sides:

> Penny: You know if you're upset, right, Mr T...he'll start saying stupid stuff like are you getting beat up at home and that, bring things up, make things up make problems for you, to go and tell other teachers.
>
> Candice: He said to (??) and she said I don't want to go home and he said what's the matter, are you getting beat up at home?
>
> Penny: Yea, that's what he said to me once so I wagged it.
>
> Candice: But I don't think teachers should actually say that to you. It's none of their business.
>
> [...]
>
> James: Sir, I came to school like with a black eye and some bruises on my arm and Mr T. accused me, said my step dad had

> beat me up...and he didn't and he was on the phone asking my mum. And I walked into t'lamp post. (9A2FGC1)

This was a particularly striking example of the nature of these conversations. Attempts to focus on how the school supports learning (or not) often ended up somewhere else, but in a place which was very revealing of the pupils' constructions of the school, which often sounds like a battleground. There is something desperate in the pupils' perceptions of how they and their families or home life are perceived by teachers.

5.5.2.3. *Motivation for language learning compared with other subjects*

In all cases, pupils placed languages bottom of their list of favourite subjects (apart from Luke who placed it seventh) and bottom in terms of its usefulness (apart from three who did not place it at all). Reasons were similar to those described above, though they were far more extreme in their comments about languages and, in particular, language teachers. On the other hand, the three girls did say that they liked "this lesson" (the conversation), since "we can speak us minds!" (9A2FGC2).

Interestingly, the four pupils (Penny, Candice, Darren and Luke) who were present in the final meeting a year later in Y10, appeared to be more positive, and were able to become animated with regard to their own suggestions for improvements to the languages curriculum. In their self-evaluation, they placed themselves between 2 and 3 on the scale of 1 to 4. Nevertheless, three of them rated languages 4 for enjoyment; Penny, who had found a new enthusiasm having moved to a higher achieving class, rated German 2.5. The pupils

commented in this meeting that there is a generally negative attitude towards languages, and this included siblings who had taken them, even with a reasonable degree of success. They also commented on the fact that they had had three or four language teachers in their time at the school. At this stage, Penny was still asking why they could not learn Spanish, and Candice was still asking "Why should we have to learn another language?"

5.5.3. Introducing the groups: 9B1

5.5.3.1. *Background*

9B1 consisted of six pupils learning languages in the upper half of Y9 and had been identified by their teachers (again Mrs Jones and Mrs Bacon) as motivated. Robert, Annie and Jodie were all learning French, and Jimmy, Mark and Lucy were doing German.

Like 9A1, the pupils enjoyed a range of out-of school activities, also of a sporting nature such as rollerblading, football (for a local team), swimming, fishing, and golf. Jodie was a keen actress, and performed for the local Youth Theatre. They had many ideas about possible future occupations: accountancy, acting, nurse or doctor, journalism, ICT technician, and the group also mentioned going to college or university. In the fourth conversation, there was a lengthy discussion about their future ambitions which largely confirmed what they had put on the forms, but adding additional ideas such as graphic design, teaching, and designing board games. Clearly many of them had no fixed ideas but were willing to consider a range of possibilities.

They appeared generally to think carefully, with all of them able to talk at length about people they know in their field of interest, and what it takes to be good at the job. In addition, parents were generally considered to be supportive.

As well as the usual holiday destinations such as "Skegness in a caravan", pupils spoke about holidays in Greece, Majorca, Minorca, Tenerife, Paris, Holland, Australia and Turkey. They were positive about school trips, though they had not been on many. In the first conversation, Mark revealed a cosmopolitan family background:

> Mark: I was brought up to speak a bit of French cos I were born in Switzerland and my grandparents lived on the border between France and Switzerland so when I were born over there I stayed over there for quite a bit so I was encouraged to speak a little bit while I was there before I got brought back over here.
>
> *T: Your parents are English are they...?*
>
> Mark: Yes they were like on holiday to visit 'em and I were born. And then they went back and I stayed with my grandparents a bit and then they came back over and brought me home.
>
> [...]
>
> Mark: A few of my dad's friends speak Turkish and Italian and stuff like that so when they come round and visit they don't speak English they only speak Turkish. It sounds a bit weird.
>
> Lucy: Can you try and understand it?
>
> Mark: Yeah, my dad were born there – in Turkey. (9B1FGC1)

Mark clearly brought with him a level of knowledge about and positive attitudes towards foreign languages.

This group engaged fully and confidently in conversations throughout the research, though there was a less positive atmosphere in the last meeting. Generally they were supportive to one another, and enjoyed disagreements. There was an element of banter amongst the pupils, and much humour was displayed, but they were always serious in their conversations. As Jodie said in the third meeting, "... I'm gonna lie in bed and think oh I should have said that!"

5.5.3.2. *General perceptions of school*

All pupils in 9B1 wrote that they liked school, saying that it was a chance to meet friends, and that it was enjoyable or would help them to get a job. In contrast to 9A2, for whom school was an intrusion in their lives, there were a number of comments in the questionnaire and conversations which suggested that life would be boring without school. Reasons for not liking a subject were the same as with 9A1.

When explaining why they liked certain subjects in their questionnaires, there were many references to enjoyment of or interest in the subject, as well as to success in it, or to its practical or varied nature. Teachers were not referred to in many cases. Usefulness was graded according to need (present or future), with references to higher education and careers. RE suffered badly from its perceived irrelevance to the pupils' immediate lives, with Jodie making an interesting subtle distinction:

> Jodie: Cos you should be learning stuff what you need to know about not what you should know about. (9B1FGC1)

Later, when asked about alternative subjects, this idea of practical relevance re-emerged, with proposals including Business Studies from Y7, medical courses, football and stage lighting.

The pupils were positive about many aspects of school, including sports, after-school clubs, slack rules, social life and trips. There was some disagreement about whether uniform was good or bad, and also as to whether they got enough or too much homework. Negative aspects included short breaktimes. When asked what they would change, there was again some reference to the physical environment:

> Jimmy: They spend 2 million putting a new extension on ... they should have spent it re-doing the old one up. It's all falling to bits. (9B1FGC1)

Jodie raised an interesting perception of school as a training ground. In a discussion (9B1FGC4) focusing on the school's role in preparing them for the future, she suggested that school "just gets you into the routine of getting up and going to work" rather than preparing them for specific futures (which she considers to be the role of the university). Jimmy agreed that schools are not merely to prepare for future jobs, but also for social life, such as pub quizzes.

This group was very ready to engage with the ways in which lessons could be improved:

> Jodie: I think like you should do a thing where everyone takes a turn like maybe once a week and a student gets to do a lesson, right, once a week and they take it in turns and they get to run it how they want to do it and t'teachers have to be sat in t'class and they can treat teachers how they want. And they have to wear uniform, t'teachers.

T: And what would you teach them?

Jodie: It's that lesson but you could teach it how you want to teach it. Make your own stuff up for the lesson.

Jimmy: Well, you could send a teacher out of the classroom.

T: Any other comments about that?

Jimmy: Yea, it would be good.

T: What would be good about that?

Jodie: Teachers get to see what it's like to be ...

Lucy: Students...

Jodie: ...a student again. It were different when they were younger and they get to see what it's like now and they get to know what students enjoy in lessons, so they can do more of that. (9B1FGC1)

Jodie appears to be calling for more pupil influence over lessons, which would make them more relevant. When prioritising advice for the head teacher, the whole group agreed that education would benefit from listening to their opinions as well as more authentic experiences:

Lucy: More school trips.

T: And that would improve learning? Can you explain that a bit?

Jimmy: You get more experience like ... real things.

Jodie: [...] when you go there you learn about other... how it used to be, like we went to t' Bradford Industrial Museum, we learnt about how they used to live. I think we should go to more interesting places as well, other than museums.

Jimmy: It's like real experience of it, like going on business field trips and stuff like that, going to see different places where people are working, so it's like when you leave school.

Mark: It's better to go out than just sit in t'classroom cos you don't know really what they are talking about. It's all just down on paper and it's boring. [...]

T: So more trips [...]. Anything else?

Mark: Listening in on what we said in that brainstorm so he can see what we like and what we wanna do and would like to change and stuff ... so he understands what students want. (9B1FGC1)

5.5.3.3. *Motivation for language learning compared with other subjects*

Similarly to 9A1, the rankings on the questionnaire did not suggest that languages were this group's favourite subject (average 5th out of 9) nor that they found it particularly useful (also average 5th). The highest ranking it got in both categories was from Jodie who placed it third. Again, however, this was largely relative to other subjects, so Robert for example, ranking it eighth favourite, wrote 'it's fun learning a different language'. Jimmy did write that he found it boring because 'it goes over the same thing again and again', an idea which will be explored further under task knowledge (TK1). Together with Lucy, he also found it difficult. This ambivalence was in fact confirmed in the final meeting, when Mark, Annie and Jodie all placed their crosses midway between 1 and 4 on the enjoyment scale, and only slightly higher for wanting to learn them. Jimmy also placed himself between 2 and 3 for wanting to learn languages, but between 3 and 4 for enjoyment.

The pupils were therefore fairly positive about language learning, though it was by no means their favourite subject. Nevertheless, their overall positive attitudes to school meant that they were prepared to engage with the subject, and they were, certainly in comparison to the demotivated group, relatively motivated.

5.5.4. Introducing the groups: 9B2

5.5.4.1. *Background*

In 9B2 there were six pupils learning languages in the upper half of Y9. Mick, Becky and Andy were learning French; Amy. Lorna and Steve were learning German.

In some ways this was the most difficult of the groups to get to know and understand. They were often subdued, and it was hard to get them to talk. On the other hand, as time went by over the year of the research, they were the pupils who warmed up most, and they offered many fascinating ideas. In the final meeting, Lorna said that she'd enjoyed that conversation most as there was more discussion and argument, and that this was because they'd got to know me better. They could appear quite sullen on occasions, but then pretend to hide from me when I went to pick them up from the classroom, later laughing good-humouredly whilst confessing that they did like coming to the conversations. The confusing situation was not helped by sporadic attendance: Amy was not seen after the first meeting; Becky was missing from the fourth and fifth meetings; three of the meetings consisted only of four pupils, and the fifth only had three pupils present. In addition, the first meeting was delayed because the pupils had to stay in their lessons for the first part, so I gave them the questionnaires to do at home. Despite reminders every time we met, I only ever received Steve's. Consequently, most of the following data is from the conversations.

In terms of out-of-school activities, pupils mentioned only sporting activities: netball and rugby (Lorna), swimming (Amy), ice-skating (Becky), football (Mick, who played in a number of teams, and Steve), and basketball (Andy). In FGC4, they spoke about ambitions to become a nursery nurse, a pilot, a footballer and a solicitor.

5.5.4.2. *General perceptions of school*

Steve wrote that he liked school 'because you meet your mates and you need it, but it sometimes gets boring'. When asked to brainstorm the positive features of their school, pupils mentioned after-school activities, sports, dinners, friends, and the fact that they have different teachers for different subjects. When asked about negative aspects, they became more animated, focusing largely on the physical environment (sports hall and equipment, changing rooms, toilets, the roof, lack of lockers, the walk from the mobile classrooms to the rest of the school, "getting educated on a building site" (Mick) and "everything's falling to bits" (Andy). They also complained that there was too much homework, no choice in PE, nothing to do in break times, uniforms, and that they had to remove their "body piercings" in PE (Amy). There were also comments about "miserable", "mardy" teachers. There was no consensus about priorities, though this led to comments about the overemphasis on writing.

5.5.4.3. *Motivation for language learning compared with other subjects*

These pupils had been identified as the less motivated members of the class. Clearly the questionnaires would have given further insights into this, but, on the other hand, they may have simply added to the confused picture I had of the

group. Just as they ranged between lively conversationalists and shy silent types, their discussions about language learning seemed to reveal many contradictions. In the first meeting, Lorna said that she liked German, but that she would do Spanish if she had to swap. Mick found French "confusing":

> Mick: All t'words seem just different from English. Like in most languages there's similar words to it so you can make a sentence up easier. (9B2FGC1)

However, when asked if pupils should have to learn a language up to the age of sixteen, they all agreed. Their siblings also appeared to have had success with language learning (FGC6).

In his questionnaire, Steve placed German as sixth favourite, and clearly meant this positively as he wrote 'because it's fun', in contrast to negative comments about science, humanities and RE, his seventh, eighth and ninth choices). He also placed it fourth for usefulness (after maths, science and English). In the sixth meeting, however, Mick placed French between 3 and 4 on the scale for enjoyment, meaning that he did not enjoy it much, and he placed it at 3 for wanting to learn it. Becky placed it at 3 for both, Steve at 2 and 2.5, and Lorna at 2 for enjoyment but 3.5 for wanting to do it.

It is therefore difficult to draw any conclusions about this group's motivation at this stage. Clearly they were more positive than 9A2, and there is also evidence to suggest that they were less positive about school in general than 9A1 or 9B1. If anything, they may be perceived as non-committal about languages, simply not very enthusiastic in the same way as they were not enthusiastic about

school in general, or about most of the meetings, and the frequent absence of some of them may be related to this.

5.6. REFLECTING ON MOTIVATION

The main purpose of this section has been to introduce the groups in order to contextualise the rest of the analysis. There are, however, some significant comments to make about this data in relation to motivation.

Firstly, motivation is relative. Pupils defined as motivated in these classes may not be identified as motivated in other contexts, and the same is true of the demotivated. The implication is that connections between the pupils' constructions of language learning and motivation can only be tentative in the analysis. However, there are clear differences between the groups, which will enable some analysis of similarities and differences. Readers of this thesis will need to think back to these introductions as they read on.

Secondly, this general introduction to the groups has been important in terms of contextualising their specific constructions of language learning. There are already suggestions that, for some pupils, there are so many layers of negative constructions about school and education in general that discussion about languages is of little interest to them, despite the insights they offer. In particular, 9A2's voices need to be heard in this light; for them, languages are of relatively little importance compared with everything else they perceive themselves as having to contend with.

Thirdly, and with regard to my focus on specific motivational beliefs, there is already some interesting data here which can shed light on the pupils' constructions of language learning. Despite the limitations of my understanding of 9B2, there are some differences between the motivated groups and the less motivated groups which are more striking than the differences between the two 'halves' of the year. For the more motivated groups, there appears to be a far greater connection made between the pupils' lives and school, and this leads to more engagement in a number of ways. The more motivated pupils make greater connections between school and their hobbies (e.g. references to extra-curricular activities) though there is some evidence of this with 9B2. There are also connections in the ways the motivated pupils construe school as a social space, where it complements their everyday lives (e.g. stops it being boring), rather than getting in the way of their lives (e.g. for 9A2 the school is constantly invading their personal space). School connects with future ambitions in the motivated groups, certainly more than with 9A2. The motivated pupils focus more on the substance of education (lesson content, methods, practical relevance, interest and enjoyment), whereas both the other groups are preoccupied by the school's physical environment. Interestingly, even where they see little connection between lessons and their needs, the motivated groups tend to be able to make detailed proposals for changing this, either through the introduction of new subjects, or through consultation processes. This latter point is particularly relevant to the pupils' desire to have a voice; Jodie's proposal that pupils should sometimes teach the lesson is a clear indication of a need for agency. It is a positive proposal for resistance, in contrast with 9A2 (and, in terms of absenteeism, 9B2) where resistance is

through confrontation or non-engagement. Finally, differences in connection can be seen in the ways in which the groups communicate in the research itself. The motivated groups are positive, constructive, and supportive of the research, as well as being able to communicate their ideas in ways which match common educational discourse. The other two groups, in different ways, do not show this same connection. 9A2 enjoy it because they can 'speak their minds', following their own agenda (and, in the process, offering fascinating insights), though communicating in a way which, despite an inner coherence, is not very transparent. 9B2 are often (but not always) non-communicative, monosyllabic and disengaged; their inconsistency suggests a lack of 'joined-up behaviour'.

6. ANALYSIS: PERSON KNOWLEDGE

6.1. INTRODUCTION

According to Wenden (1996: 235), drawing on Flavell (1979, 1981), person knowledge "refers to knowledge one has acquired regarding human learning in general (e.g. it takes a special aptitude to learn a language) and motivational beliefs about oneself as a learner in a particular setting (e.g. that one does not have the competence to complete the task or to take charge of one's own learning)". This definition was used as a starting point for an exploration of the pupils' constructions of the learner in general, and of themselves as (language) learners. The protocol for FGC2 in particular was designed to include a number of activities which would encourage the pupils to articulate these constructions (see Appendix 4). As such, it touches on other areas, for example strategic and task knowledge, as it was felt necessary to begin with specific examples of activities carried out by pupils and discussion of how they had approached them, in order to lead to deeper issues of learning. Data arising from this conversation also includes an introductory written self-reporting activity (coded SR), and a set of self-evaluation statements which they had to complete (coded SE).

The initial aims of this set of conversations were to explore the ways in which these pupils describe and evaluate themselves as language learners, as well as gaining insights into what they believe to be a good language learner, and these were revisited in different ways in other sets of conversations, in particular FGC6. The analysis will focus on ways in which the pupils believe that the learner can control and influence their learning, opening up possibilities for

aspects of self-regulation or self-management to emerge. It will also consider what may constrain the learner's control and influence and, hence, their learning. Each group analysis will be followed by a brief summary. This is highly tentative at this stage, and will be refined as the analysis progresses. It is, however, useful to show how the overall picture was gradually built up.

6.2 PERSON KNOWLEDGE: 9A1

This group has a strong sense of their own role in learning. For them, learning is influenced by their effort and hard work. This is categorised in a number of ways. Firstly, in order to be successful, they need to spend time on their work ("I was not rushing it because I would of forgot the words and phrases." (Louis, SR)).

As well as time, neatness and layout are mentioned often by pupils, for example, when Helen writes a teacher report on a piece of work she was particularly pleased with (describing her family's day):

> "She put a lot of time and effort into it. She has lurned quite a bit about her families day and she had set it out into different times for her mum, dad and her brother." (Helen, SR)

According to Carl, a good learner listens to the teachers, and for Helen s/he does his/her best (10A1FGC6).

Attention to detail is also important, and this includes a major focus on learning words, including spellings and accents, and revising. For this to be successful, Helen refers to the need for self-discipline to ensure that she does not pretend to herself that she knows the words when she in fact does not:

> Helen: [speaking about the 'look, cover and write' strategy] ... I just, I don't think it works [...], well I used to do it like that and used to like, like write it down, remember it and then if I couldn't remember I used to have a little peek at it and like I didn't really remember 'em if you know what I mean 'cause you're like so tempted to have a look because it, they're there at t'side so I just get my mum to help me. (9A1 FGC1)

As revealed in other places, Helen knows her weaknesses, and can sometimes find ways of addressing them.

Pupils are clearly motivated by success, and they know that they can influence this. Louis was determined to move into the upper half of the year, which he in fact did in Y10 (SE).

A major marker of success for these pupils is the school reward system, characterised by a complex system of slips of different colours, though this will later be seen as problematic. It is described by this group as follows:

> Nadia: They were like...
>
> Louis: stamps
>
> Nadia: ...smiley faces and whatever...
>
> *T: oh, right*
>
> Louis: Like stars and tens
>
> *T: yeah*
>
> [laughter]
>
> [...]
>
> Nadia: When you get ten you get a gold slip, so you like do all your work very good so you get a stamp.
>
> *T: erumm. What's a gold slip?*

Helen: A thing. It's like if you do well and that and then a teacher thinks that you deserve it then they gi' you like a gold thing, a golden thing like a pen for different like stuff and that.

[...]

Helen: And once you get ten you get umm... platinum.

Nadia: ...platinum slip

(unclear)

T: platinum slip, right?

Helen: and then you get twenty other like commendation... (unclear) certificate ... I don't know what you get when yer get it, but it's good.

T: Yeah. And, and that, that helps you to learn?

Helen: Yeah 'cause yer thinking oh if I do this then get a gold slip and then I can get like more things like a certificate... (9A1FGC1)

The pupils know that learners learn in different ways, and they focus in particular on broad learning styles. Carol describes her visual learning style:

Carol: Yeah. It helps yer learn a lot easier and to remember oh that one page and y'know t'answer then...

[...]

Carol: Cos there are some pages more interesting than others, like more colour, more pictures stand out to yer...

[...]

Carol: A question like umm 'what's a food chain?' you think 'oh I saw that food chain wi' that rabbit and that grass' and...things like that. (9A1FGC2)

Helen also finds pictures helpful:

Helen: ...'cause say it were something like cooking you, you'll think 'oh that woman wi' her bowl [snigger] stirring it' woun't yer. You woun't think 'oh, how d'you spell that?' You'd think o' t'picture more than t'word. (9A1FGC2)

They also believe that the learner does not learn as well if they cannot learn in their preferred way. Because of the visual learning style of many of them, they are particularly keen on the use of flashcards, and regret that they are no longer used in Y9:

> Helen: In year 8 we used to use flash cards...
>
> Louis: Yeah.
>
> Helen: ...wi' all pictures on but in year 8 we don't now but I used to like them flash cards...
>
> Carol: I did.
>
> Helen: ...because it like, once like she'll show it yer and she'll say like what it is and then with that card you remember that word because you remember t'picture...so I think they should bring back flash cards! (9A1FGC2)

Finally, the pupils suggest that they need specific environmental and social conditions for learning, such as some noise (though not television, says Helen), and the space to discuss ways of learning with others, "because then you'll know where your weak places are won't you?" (Helen, 9A1FGC2), and "'cos then you can try their methods can't you, how they do it and things like that" (Carol, 9A1FGC2).

When asked to give advice to a young language learner (my daughter), the group's ideas are summed up by Louis:

> Louis: Concentrate, revise through books, listen to teacher, do what you're told, try your best in all areas. (9A1FGC2)

All of these, (even 'do what you're told'), imply actions which the pupils themselves can take and a sense of their own control over and responsibility for learning, even if this means placing themselves in the hands of their teacher.

They do, however, identify some constraints on this control. These can be external; for example, the learner cannot concentrate when the class is "messing around" (Louis, 9A1FGC2), making lots of "racket, annoying!" (Helen, 9A1FGC2). When, as a summary question, the group is asked who needs to change the most for their learning to improve, Carol suggests the "naughty ones" in the class. However, there is also a sense that the teacher needs to change, because they do not always make the lessons interesting, which can prevent them from concentrating.

This group also recognises, however, that they themselves can be the barrier to learning ("You're like nosy, and you don't wanna miss anything" (Helen, 9A1FGC2)), suggesting that they can lose control over themselves. Carol and Helen also refer to a frequently mentioned issue in this group, namely their own self-consciousness, which can prevent them from asking questions:

> Carol: [...] Sometimes you feel embarrassed to put your hand up and say 'I can't do it' and things like that in front of your friends.
>
> Helen: I know 'cause most o' t'time you just like put your hand up and then she asks you, say she's like stood right over there so you've got to shout it out and like if you go 'oh, come over 'ere I want to ask yer' it sounds like rude don't it, 'come over 'ere'?
>
> *T: I see.*
>
> Helen: You never know what else to say so you just like shout it and then all your friends are like laughing and saying 'oh don't yer know that?' (9A1FGC2)

As may be expected in a group which identifies the good learner with hard work, they see that learning problems may be caused by their own lack of application. Helen knows that if she did more, she could overcome her problem with spelling:

> Helen: Spelling t'words properly, 'cause I spell 'em as I like I, like I say 'em...
>
> *T: right*
>
> Helen: ...and I just think, well if I say it like that then you spell 'em like that but...
>
> [laughter] [...]
>
> *T: What have you put for 'if I think I did better if I... '?*
>
> Helen: Revise [snigger]
>
> *T: If you revised.*
>
> Helen: Yeah. Revise t'words and that.
>
> *T: yeah*
>
> Helen: Get them into my head and learn how to spell 'em properly. (9A1FG2)

Despite the fact that the solution lies in her own hands, she feels that she does not have sufficient control over occasional lapses in effort. She goes on to explain this by saying that she does not always listen to advice to revise because she thinks that she already knows the words, recognising both complacency and, on several occasions, poor self-evaluation skills, as problems:

> Helen: Half the time you couldn't be bothered to revise do you. You just think 'oh you'll, you know all stuff... you don't really, really need to learn it. You just like look through your book...You just go 'oh I know it now' and hope for t'best. (9A1FG2)

There is a sense that greater support with self-evaluation and self-organisation would help the group. For example, Carol feels that they need the kind of revision support they get in science:

> Carol: [...] in science right you've got certain science revision books and it helps yer, and I think it'd be better if they did one

> in languages because I've been getting' higher marks in my science tests... (9A1FG2)

This readiness to locate the problem in their own weaknesses even extends to Carl's statement that he does not listen to the teacher enough. His lack of concentration in lessons is a result of boredom ("I hate listening for a long time so...I get bored after about ten minutes" (10A1FGC6)), but he is prepared to suggest that he should nonetheless listen, and does not blame the teacher entirely. Unlike the girls in this group, Carl also separates learning from working, though he explains this by conceptualising learning as doing oral practice with flashcards (which he enjoys) and working as writing (which "does me 'ead in"):

> Carl: I like learning and that, and I like doin 'em. It's better than working, cos I don't like working." (9A1FGC3)

Carl is also one of the pupils offering an important insight into the way in which the choice involved in independent learning can be a constraint if it is not monitored carefully, and if quantity rather than quality of work is rewarded:

> Carl: I should pick hard ones cos I'm quite clever me, but I don't I pick easy ones.
>
> *T: Don't you find that boring?*
>
> Carl: No, then you get right more done don't you, and they say "ahh well done Carl – just keep on." (9A1FGC4)

He recognises that his own laziness is a constraint, but also sees that this is condoned by his teachers. In a way, he is more aware of his own potential than his teachers are. The use of praise, or indeed the school's reward system, as an attempt to control the pupils' behaviour in fact can constrain their learning.

This is recognised by many pupils, such as in the following exchanges. The first shows how self-assessment is undermined:

> Nadia: When we've got independent work we've got a folder with all t'answers in so we can mark our own.
>
> Louis: We used to have in Y8. We don't in Y9 cos it's like folders...and you can just write your answers from that, for t'tasks, so we write a page of our answers...
>
> *T: [...] Why would they do that?*
>
> Louis: To get the stamps to get the gold slips. (9A1FGC3)

Here we see confirmation of how it discourages pupils from stretching themselves:

> Louis: Most people go for levels one and two cos they're easy. They don't go for like level three and set themselves a challenge.
>
> *T: Isn't that boring? [...]*
>
> Nadia: It depends if you like, say there's a teacher who says you've got to do three tasks and then you get a gold slip, then everyone goes for t'easiest ones cos then you know you'll get a gold slip at t'end of it.
>
> *T: That's clever!*
>
> Louis: Cos you get stamps, and people who are at 1 or 2 get them right and get more stamps than those ...level 3 takes more time so that you don't do as much in the lesson.
>
> *T: But doesn't your teacher know that you should be doing level 3?*
>
> Carol: She just stamps it, she doesn't really know. (9A1FGC3)

It would appear that this attempt to use extrinsic motivation can in fact reduce pupils' motivation if the aim is to control behaviour and encourage quantity rather than quality of work. It certainly seems to drive their actions more directly than any capacity for self-evaluation or self-management.

6.2.1. Summary of person knowledge (9A1)

In terms of person knowledge, these pupils have a clear picture of the learner as hard worker and as such believe that they themselves, through their own agency, are responsible for and have control over their learning. They want to learn in order to do well, but recognise that a major constraint on their learning comes from themselves, through weakness or loss of control, and know that they do not always live up to their picture of the good learner. They also are aware, however, of other external elements which can limit the control that they have over learning, such as other pupils, the teacher and the system of rewards which, ironically, has been put in place to encourage them.

It could be said that the pupils have a belief in internal locus of control whilst also attributing constraints on learning mainly internally to largely stable factors. They have knowledge of internal learning processes (aspects of self-regulation), but these are quite naïve, focusing on effort and broader learning styles. The pupils may benefit from support with more sophisticated processes such as self-evaluation and self-management.

6.3. PERSON KNOWLEDGE: 9A2

In contrast with 9A1, the learner is construed by 9A2 as having virtually no control over learning. The picture which emerges is of the 'good' learner is someone who simply does what the teacher wants.

When asked to think of themselves as language learners by describing a task that they felt pleased with and writing a self-report, they are unable to do this,

either talking in general terms about behaviour (Luke, Darren, Katy), or about English (Penny) or RE (Candice). In the self-evaluation activity, most references are to being good at copying. Interestingly, when asked how they learn, the discussion immediately moves to the issue of whom they work with. The girls offer a number of reasons why they sometimes learn better in groups, ranging from being able to share ideas and work to their strengths, to being able to chat, though Candice recognises that some work is better done alone (and the boys later say that they work better alone):

> Penny: You know when you talk, you're talking with your friend and that and not doing your work, you get shifted, I don't do no work when I'm on my own, but when I'm with friends I seem to do more work. I don't like it being on my own. I work better when I'm with people. (Lots of agreement from Katy and Candice.) [...]
>
> *T: What is it about being with somebody else rather than being on your own?*
>
> Penny: It's just better.
>
> Darren: You copy everything.
>
> Penny: No it's not to copy!
>
> [...]
>
> Penny: Cos sat on your own's boring.
>
> Katy: (unclear)... I don't get it me when they're going on and on and I don't know what to do. I don't even listen.
>
> [...]
>
> Candice: I can work better on my own, but on the other hand I can work better with other people. I can work in a group and I can work on my own but I work better on my own when I'm writing.
>
> [...]

T: That's a really interesting point. But have you any idea why it might be better, why you might learn better in poster work when you're in a group?

Candice: Because you're with your mates and they talk to you.

Penny: You get on with your work when you're with somebody else anyway don't you?

T: What do you talk about?

Candice: Nought, you just talk about what you're doing.

Penny: It depends. You'll have each other's ideas to put together then it's easier for you to do your work.

Candice: Yea, if there's one good drawer in t'group, they can draw.

Penny: Some can write. Or just sit there and let everybody else do the work.

Candice: Yeah, like us lot.

[...]

> Candice: [...] Your brain works faster than it does with your friends cos you're thinking of your friend's conversation and you can't get on with your work. (9A2FGC2)

In their conversations, pupils construe themselves as having no control over their learning. Occasionally they point to elements within themselves which prevent them from learning, but they tend not to have any control over these, e.g. lack of confidence (Candice) and a lack of ability:

> Luke: Miss keeps saying I'm gonna get moved up [...] But I shouldn't. I'm right thick. (9A2FGC2)

This can provoke a sense of panic when asked a question:

> Penny: Panic? Oh, when you're sat there in class and she picks you out. You know like when you don't know what she's on about, and everybody else is saying it right but a lot of people don't know what she's on about, and you sit there, right gormy...(9A2FGC2)

However, constraints on their learning are mostly located elsewhere, such as pupils in the class with special needs demanding more teacher time (Penny), or the subject itself (overwhelmingly considered to be 'crap') or the particular language. The main obstacle to learning for these pupils, however, is by far the teacher. When asked how they could learn better, focus is immediately drawn to the teacher:

T: What would be a good learner?

Candice: If they encouraged you more.

Penny: Make it fun. (10A2FGC6)

Even when (in Y10) Candice recognizes that she may have a part to play, the attention is shifted to the incomprehensible teacher:

T: What would you do to be a better learner?

Candice: Just try and understand what they are saying to you. They do your head in though, cos like she'll say something to you and you'll say to her what does it mean, and she just goes, you know what I mean. She'll ask us all the time what it says in English and we don't know what she's on about. She just babbles on. (10A2FGC6)

Penny offers an example of how she construes teachers as unreasonable when she describes how the (science) teacher was annoyed that she was eating her birthday cake in the lesson. There are many comments about the teachers not listening to or simply not liking them, or helping only the best pupils. Penny is exasperated that the teachers expect her to understand what has been covered in the lessons once she leaves the classroom, and Katy complains about teachers' reactions to homework difficulties:

Katy: When you come back and you haven't done it, and you say you didn't know what to do, they say "That's your problem, bring it back tomorrow". (9A2FGC2)

This problematisation of the teacher and lack of awareness of her own influence is exemplified in the following statement by Penny:

> Penny: Sir, you know the reason why me and Katy don't understand German is because if you don't listen to her then she don't pay no attention to you, she ignores you. Goes to t'ones who know what they're doing. She never helps you. If you don't listen then she never helps you...You shout her and she just walks away. That's why we don't know nought cos if you don't know it then she blanks you out. (9A2FGC6)

In Y10, Penny moves to a different class and begins to find German easier ("I know what I'm doing now. I'm not thick now." (10A2FGC5)), and this is because of the teacher (though she still finds the lessons boring). At this point she also suggests that it would be better to have one teacher for the five years rather than changing all the time, as "you'd get used to them" (10A2FGC6).

One teacher is criticised for lack of experience ("only taught it once before" (Penny, 10A2FGC5), and another for youth "she's only about twenty her" (Candice, 10A2FGC6). Others are subjected to strong attacks on personal qualities, such as having a bad temper:

> Candice: Like Miss R, she can be all right sometimes and then other times she's like a tiger, she goes ('roaring noise'), and our Miss, she's just evil. I swear her eyeballs turn red and she just turns. (9A2FGC2)

Oversensitivity is also criticised:

> Candice: Our science teacher has got such an attitude problem, like. He looks at you and like if you are saying something under your breath he will say, was that aimed at me?
>
> Penny: Even if you're talking to someone else. (10A2FGC6)

Furthermore, teachers' attempts to praise can be construed as manipulation:

> Candice: They shouldn't like...t'teachers who go 'oh that's right good, that's very good' even though they know it's not right good. (9A2FGC2)

In fact, for Candice, the teacher could be dispensed with, so much do they prevent learning:

> Candice: I think you'd learn more if they just sat the TV in front of you and put videos on. (10A2FGC6)

It is clear then that there is little evidence of satisfaction in themselves as learners. Where they do appear to gain satisfaction, however, is in their battles with the teacher. Though they are a little motivated by gold slips, they get far more excited by other slips given as sanctions:

> Penny: [...] You got a pink slip for walking out o'lesson.
>
> *T: Pink slips are bad then?*
>
> Penny: Right bad, worse than a white slip.
>
> (A discussion ensues about which is worse)
>
> Katy: A pink slip isn't worser than a white slip is it?
>
> Candice: A white slip's a concern slip, a pink slip's better.
>
> Penny: Pink slips have to go home. White slips don't. I've got five white slips now.
>
> Katy: I've got no white slips, I've got two pink slips, I've never been to room 21, but I've been excluded about five times.
>
> (discussion ensues about numbers of various slips – Luke becomes quite animated) (9A2FGC2)

James is quite proud that his behaviour is usually so bad that "I get a gold slip for being good me" (9A2FGC2). Penny suggests that teachers deserve to be treated with contempt:

> Penny: [...] She started having a right go at her so she just laughed in her face and ignored her. You have to." (9A2FGC2)

These pupils offer evidence that for them such open resistance in the classroom is a source of self-esteem, and the only way in which they can have any influence. Yet they are also desperate to be heard. In the third meeting, we hear a rare favourable comment on some teachers:

> *T: Luke, you just said a comment about what the teachers do in other subjects and you said 'they teach'. What does that mean?*
>
> Luke: They do. They teach us. I don't know.
>
> *T: Which way do you think you learn best then?*
>
> Candice: When they talk to you and communicate with you more.
>
> Penny: Yeah. That's what it is, innit? (9A2FGC3)

6.3.1. Summary of person knowledge (9A2)

This group's knowledge of the learner is limited to their construction of themselves as disenfranchised victims of circumstances. They are powerless to influence their learning, at the mercy of forces which militate against them. They are victims, and do not often see how they themselves may provoke negative responses. When they do recognise this, however, they feel justified, as it is a small victory. Though the pupils have made some interesting comments on the learner in general, there is very little evidence of self-regulation and no sense of self-management. Any constructions of the learner in these terms are, in fact, only expressed after the pupils have had the opportunity to voice their constructions of the learner in conflict. As far as the language learner is concerned, this is even lower in the list of priorities.

These pupils could be said to have a belief in external locus of control, and attribute constraints on their learning entirely externally to stable factors. They

also voice this externally, with little internal reflection and much anger. The situation is that of a battlefield. Perhaps the only hope for a positive resolution is to negotiate, a difficult prospect for the teacher. With communication and through understanding, the school may then be able to connect more with these pupils by adjusting the curriculum in ways which may encourage a new construction of the learner to develop.

6.4. PERSON KNOWLEDGE: 9B1

For 9B1, learners are construed as having full responsibility for their progress, in control of the outcomes in a number of ways. The conversations with these pupils are characterised by many lengthy exchanges about not only the efforts needed to learn, but also the ways in which the learner can learn, and these are confirmed by the self-reporting and self-evaluation activities as well as by the advice to a young language learner. A good learner has to want to learn, and then takes charge of the learning process, making efforts to fix the learning in the memory, going "o'er it loads of times in your head, try and remember it" (Jimmy, 9B1FGC2). There is also awareness of the memorising process, with the need to find ways of memorising, then monitoring learning, only looking it up or asking for help (from teacher or parent) when absolutely necessary. As such, there is no frustration expressed about the process, and the learner persists:

> Jodie: And if you forget, you can try to work out what to write instead of... you don't just automatically look in your book, you have to think about it first. Don't just give up straight away. Just think about it, and then if you can't do it, you have to look in your book.
>
> Jimmy: And if you can't do it then, you have to ask the teacher. I find that at the beginning, I always get...if you're starting a

new topic I forget it straight away, it doesn't come till about half way through doing it.

Annie: Writing it down on a piece of paper while you remember and then just put it in your book, just write it down.

Jodie: And if you write down stuff that you can't remember, you keep looking at that and that lot comes on so you're not just keep looking over t'stuff that you can remember. (9B1FGC2)

It is important for the learner to be able to work something out for him/herself, and this needs to be developed, for example, in preparation for examinations in case the learner is faced with something which has not been learned:

Jodie: I think it is because it gets you thinking, and so then when you're doing your GCSEs you don't automatically look at it and think "Oh God I've got nothing to do now cos I don't understand it". You have to sit and think about it. (9B1FGC2)

Again this emphasises that the responsibility for success is located firmly in the learner.

The group reveals sophisticated levels of knowledge of the mental processes involved in learning. An example of this is revealed when the pupils are discussing the differences between learning languages and learning other subjects:

Jimmy: Everything else you talk in English...

Lucy: It seems more work.

Jimmy: Yes it seems to be a lot more work.

Lucy: It's like you're learning a different language while you're learning what t'words mean an' things like that. You're learning how to speak it while you're learning how they speak it.

Jodie: Yes because, like say in science or maths, you're only speaking one language and having to learn one thing, but say in French, cos you're doing this (holds up timetable) you've got to

> think about your own one in English, and French as well, so that's a bit confusing sometimes. (9B1FGC2)

Evidence is also provided when they evaluate themselves as learners. Here they construe learners as needing to be able to analyse their strengths and weaknesses in detail. Jimmy recognises that he is better with 'specific' learning content, identifying topics such as food and shopping, than with more abstract concepts:

> Jimmy: I'm better at more pacific things, specific things like that rather than more vague things like things you don't do very often or putting sentences together, things like that. (9B1FGC2)

For these pupils, the learner learns from mistakes, though their high expectations of themselves mean that they do not like making them in front of others. Nevertheless it is important to them that the teacher corrects mistakes, unless it is "a really big mistake and you'd be really embarrassed buy it" in which case "they should just pretend they've not heard you or something" (Jodie, 9B1FGC2). It is the learner's responsibility to learn from mistakes (in written work a highlighter pen is recommended). If anything is not understood, it is the learner's responsibility to find out by asking:

> Jodie: [...] If she like tells you something and you don't understand what you've got to do, you've gotta, don't just sit there and think, oh I'm not gonna do it cos I don't understand it, you should always ask the teacher, or you'll never get to know. (9B1FGC2)

This self-monitoring and self-evaluation then leads into target-setting which most of the group find important:

> Jodie: Yes cos you know, once you've put it down and you understand what you need to do, you can focus on that more.
>
> Lucy: Set yourself targets.
>
> Jodie: Yes cos you have to set yourself targets as well.

T: Do you like working with targets?

Lucy: Yes.

Jodie: Yes cos you can say like 'I want to get five As by the end of this term in my independent tasks' and you've got to work towards it. (9B1FGC2)

Jimmy has his misgivings, however, which suggest that the skill of target-setting cannot be taken for granted:

Jimmy: Can't be bothered with them. Takes you forever to think of one and after you've done it, it's just hard to try and keep it. (9B1FGC2)

However, the group generally displays a strong understanding of evaluation, which extends to reflection over longer periods of learning:

T: You probably always do quite well when you've learnt vocab or something for a test. If you didn't do all that well once, would you think about how you'd learnt it, and perhaps try a different way?

Jimmy: It's all right on occasions. You'd think it might just be a one-off, you're just not focussing that hard on that unit if it's just a one-off. If you do it often...

Jodie: Yes but if there's two units that you do find difficult...if you're usually good and you have a one-off bad, you'd think, come on you've gotta do it properly now. But if you do a few bad in a row, you have to stop and think about it, what you're doing wrong. (10B1FGC6)

The pupils speak about their preoccupation with detail, suggesting that this can be a weakness. Jodie writes that she would do better if she "wasn't as confused and getting my 'it's and 'is'es all mixed up" (SE). She wants her work to be perfect and this involves understanding subtle grammatical differences, such as 'I' and 'we' (9B1FGC2). For Jimmy, this leads to a complaint about English:

Jimmy: [...] Everything you've done in another language you still haven't done it in your own. We know where to put all

> t'apostrophes and that in German, but we haven't learnt like whether it goes after 's' or before 's' in English. (9B1FGC2)

The control over learning extends to the presentation of their work; loss of such control leads to anxiety:

> Jimmy: If it's rough work I like scribbling it down and that, but if it's neat work I like it neat or it stresses me out.
>
> Lucy: Everybody wants their work to look neat.
>
> [...]
>
> Jodie: Like I sit next to Adam in languages and he never underlines his titles. It gets me really mad because they scream to be underlined. (9B1FGC2)

Their high standards extend to the need for the learner to be organised, and they offer many examples of their own organisation, both in the broader sense of managing resources and deadlines, and in the sense of having an organised approach to tasks (though in FGC6 they also all claim not to be organised enough). For example, organising notes:

> Jimmy: You know like little words that you don't like writing or something, but they're like 'in', 'on', [...] you can write them in t'back o' your book like, have a glossary in't back o' your book. (9B1FGC2)

Jodie and Jimmy suggest how self-organisation may be supported:

> Jodie: Cos like I always do my homework in everything on the night it's been set...
>
> Jimmy: Yes you just like tick it off in t'order, when you've done something, and stuff what you haven't done.
>
> Jodie: If we didn't have the homework diary we'd be lost.
>
> Jimmy: You'd forget what you've got and what you haven't got. (9B1FGC2)

These pupils offer much evidence that they are motivated by their own sense of and need for success (referring to marks and National Curriculum levels), challenge ("I found it quite hard so I'm pleased with it" (Jodie, 9B1FGC2)), as well as ambition in terms of examinations and jobs:

> Annie: Just to get a good job, I work hard, so I don't have to work in a shop.
>
> Jodie: I don't wanna work in a shop. (10B1FGC6)

Though there is little evidence that these pupils learn languages because they love them (compared with the way in which, for example, Jodie speaks about Drama in 10B1FGC6), they construe the learner as someone for whom motivation should come from within, and do not like this to be compromised by others' efforts to motivate them:

> Jimmy: You have to want to learn. If you don't want to learn you just don't bother.
>
> [...]
>
> Jimmy: I know what my Mum is, the minute you walk through t'door, 'how much homework and you've got to get straight to it', t'minute I walk in - haven't even time to take my shoes off before she asks.
>
> Jodie: My Mum isn't like that, [...] she says oh if you do it, do it. If you don't, it's your own fault. She's not one of these that stands over you and says you will do your all your homework [...] she says, oh you're responsible enough now, if you've got it, you go and do it, I'm not going to tell you to do it. And she'll say oh what have you done today at school and that, or if there was a test she will ask how I've done. [...]
>
> *T: So what makes you do it then?*
>
> Jodie: Because I want to succeed, and my brother did right well, so I don't want to look stupid at t'side of him.
>
> Mick: My Mum's a teacher so she goes too far with it. So like as soon as I walk in, it's do your homework now, do it right well

> and let me check through it. And I can't stand my Mum checking through my work...(10B1FGC6)

As Jodie suggests, this motivation may come from wanting to prove oneself to others, and this is stated in strong terms by Mick:

> Mick: I know I can do just about everything. Everything I'm asked to do I find it.... I know I'm quite, I know I'm clever, but I've been told that I lack concentration [...]. Because all my teachers put me down because of my concentration so I want to do well, so at the end of the year, when I get a better grade than what was predicted I can take it to them and say "I've done better than you thought", and put them in their place. (Smiles). (10B1FGC6)

Interestingly, when considering what might constrain their ability to control their learning, pupils refer to a number of internal, but mostly external factors. Internal factors include poor organisation and lack of confidence (for example, Lucy finds it difficult to develop her speaking skills), though there is generally a sense of being able to do something about this. There is also the need for a life outside school, but again this is manageable:

> Mick: You need to balance your time with friends on one side and keep your school work and everything up to scratch on the other side. It's quite hard to do but if you can it's good.
> Jimmy: Perfect. (10B1FGC6)

External factors include other pupils who try to constrain their learning, though again it is possible to rise above this situation:

> Mick: People around you. Cos it makes you, if there is only you what's willing to learn and all your friends around you put you down if you want to learn and if they don't want to learn themselves. Usually it works and they don't bother.
>
> Jimmy: And you get called boffins and stuff like that. And then when they haven't done their work they always come to you to copy or for some help. (10B1FGC6)

External pressure can also cause the learner anxiety and affect learning:

> Mick: [...] It's like when you do...like in languages, we start doing us tests that count towards us mark at t'end of the year. And they put too much pressure on you and you feel worried when you're doing them that you need to get full marks, or you're not going to do well. You just don't concentrate as well because you're that worried if you don't do well then your mum's gonna get on the back of us. (10B1FGC6)

More difficult to contend with are home problems of a more serious nature:

> Mick: I think it's to do with home because if something is wrong at home then that often puts you off doing any work. Because when I had problems at home, if any teacher just had to prompt me or something, or they raised their voice, I totally lost it. I used to shout back, argue back, got an attitude straight away. If things at home aren't right well, you don't really wanna learn. It puts you off learning, it puts you off school.
>
> Jodie: If there's something troubling you then you don't want to know about that. You just want to try and get that better [...]
>
> Jimmy: I think it weren't this Christmas past but the Christmas before, right, someone close in the family had a stroke and the whole family was unbalanced. Everyone was always in a bad mood and that, cos they'd that much pressure then everything got bad at school. You stop concentrating for a bit. (10B1FGC6)

Finally, the teacher or the learning system itself can constrain learning, and aspects of this are beyond the learner's control. Jimmy suggests that there may not be enough appropriate resources to choose from which means that he has to do tasks which are too difficult. There is a discussion about the need for teacher stability, since frequent changes of teacher mean that neither teacher nor learner can get to know what is expected. In addition, pupils complain that teachers do not always respond well to difficult classes, and that this disrupts learning:

> Jodie: Yea, because people who do want to learn don't learn as much because the teacher is spending more time telling the kids that are messing about than she or he does learning you.

> Mick: Teachers just don't bother trying to make it interesting. If after one lesson and you're not concentrating, I'm not going to waste my time trying to make my lesson fun and interesting, and trying to relate to everyone. I'm just going to go in, put it on the board and give them a book. If they don't do it, they don't do it and then I'll give them detention or I'll send them out and they'll have to work with their tutor and stuff like that. If you're not going to put effort in, then they will not put effort in either. I'll just do what they do. If they're going to make my life hell, I'll just make theirs hell same way. (10B1FGC6)

The pupils still accept their own responsibility though, and a sense of partnership in learning comes across throughout all the conversations:

> Jimmy: Some of it, the children's responsible, you can revise it for tests and that, but t'teachers could help you, and give you tips for revising, and having like a revising lesson where you go over everything you've done, not just say go home and learn it. (9B1FGC2)

> *T: [...] what to you is more important for learning: to be a good learner, or to have a good teacher?*
>
> Jimmy: To be a good learner.
>
> Mick: I think a good teacher.
>
> Annie: Teacher.
>
> Jodie: I think both.
>
> Mick: If you haven't got a good teacher you can't learn nought.
>
> *T: Do you not find things out for yourself?*
>
> Mick: Don't think you'd want to...(?)
>
> Jimmy: I think if you're not a good learner you can't learn ought anyway. Really both.
>
> Mick: I think if you haven't got a good teacher and you're a good learner anyway, then I don't think you want to... I think if you don't get it given to you in school and you don't really want to find it out yourself, but if you've got a good teacher at school, they encourage you and you feel like you should do it to learn more, because you get credit for it. But you need a good teacher that helps you be a good learner. (10B1FGC6)

The pupils' high standards extend therefore to their expectations of their teachers. They believe that the teacher needs to be good, but do not use this to absolve themselves of any responsibility. However, they feel secure enough about themselves as learners to be able to suggest changes in their teachers too.

6.4.1. Summary of person knowledge (9B1)

For this group, the learner not only has responsibility for learning, but also has a sophisticated control over the learning process. Levels of knowledge with regard to both self-regulation and self-management appear to be high, enabling them to control how they learn and the learning outcomes. Motivation is largely internal, and the group in fact tends to find external attempts to drive (or control) them intimidating and harmful to learning. However, though they feel confident about their role in learning, they still demand high standards of external support which will enable them to progress.

These pupils appear to have a belief in internal locus of control, and are so confident in this that they almost entirely attribute constraints on their learning to external factors, most of which are perceived as unstable in that they can be challenged positively. The learners need to be given opportunities to exercise this control as much as possible.

6.5. PERSON KNOWLEDGE: 9B2

Analysing this group offered me an insight into a distinction between metacognitive knowledge and beliefs. This was brought about by the marked contrast between what the pupils believe a learner should be like, and the

knowledge that they have about themselves as learners. The two aspects are in fact in conflict with each other.

These pupils believe a learner should have control over learning. The good learner is described in very similar ways to 9A1's description: organised, active, attentive, industrious, neat etc (FGC2, FGC6 and SRs). When asked to describe an activity which gave them satisfaction, the self-reports focused largely on time spent on the activity and the marks they got, also revealing that in some cases the effort made and concentration put into the activity was uncharacteristic ('I put quite a lot of effort into this because I didn't talk as much as I usually do' (Steve, SR)). Presentation of work was also mentioned by several pupils (e.g. 'I put a lot of effort and time into this piece of work and spent a lot of time looking up words in a dictionary and also spent a long time drawing and colouring the pictures' (Andy, SR)). A further aspect mentioned in the self-report recurred at various points through the conversations, namely the satisfaction gained from doing it "from my head" (Mark, 9B2FGC2; also 'Mark did this task well, he tried to use his own knowledge of the French he understood…' (SR)). For these pupils, these are the features of a good learner.

For this group, learners learn in different ways. Memorising is important, recurring many times, and for some this is supported by pictures ("you think of the picture in your head and then you remember it" (Lorna, FGC2)), whereas others need to write words and sentences "because it helps you to learn it more than just reading through your book" (Mick, FGC2). They can also work out words from the context, or look in dictionaries if they cannot (9B2FGC2).

Learners learn from mistakes, so it is important that the teacher corrects them, albeit sensitively:

> Steve: It's like if they correct you all the time, you'll feel like you can't do it. (9B2FGC2)

They also monitor and evaluate themselves in order to progress:

> Andy: Yes, cos if you think about what you're not good at you can improve on it. (9B2FGC2)

In FGC4, they speak about target setting, which they find useful for meeting their individual needs.

In order to improve, learners need to listen, concentrate, ask, practise with friends, and take home appropriate homework (SEs). They also need to want to learn:

> Mick. [...] You really need to want to learn language but if you don't want to then you won't change. (All agree.) (10B2FGC6)

The pupils therefore construe learners as being active in their learning, with control over the learning outcomes. However, as some of the data above has already indicated, they know that they themselves do not live up to this. To a certain extent, they look to outside influences on this. For example, they suggest that it would be better to have fewer changes of teacher. They also agree that learning activities should be more enjoyable and stimulating in order to activate their brains:

> Andy: You learn better if you're doing something you like, not just copying off the board.
>
> *T: What is it about this copying off the board.*
>
> Andy: Boring.

[...]

Andy: You're just sat there writing all the time.

T: When you're copying, what are you thinking? Try to think about the last time, what do you think?

Lorna: I don't think you take no notice of what it says. You just copy it down so you don't learn as much. (9B2FGC2)

By Y10, they are also sceptical about the system of gold slips which they see as encouraging cheating:

Lorna: But everyone just used to try and get through t'tasks as quickly as they could.

Steve: So they'd get gold slips.

[...]

Lorna: So everyone was just getting t'mark book and just copying t'answers down, and ticking them all.

T: So actually the gold slips weren't perhaps such a good idea...

Mick: It was for the first two years, but then everybody just saw through it and weren't bothered about getting them.

[...]

Lorna: Gold slips do encourage you to work harder and work faster but then you do just cheat to get through it all. (10B2FGC6)

Steve is also wary of false praise, and the others agree with him. When asked what the school can do to prepare the learner for the future, he suggests the following:

Steve: Make you more confident...in yourself.

T: How can a school do that?

Steve: Drama and that...saying you're good...and you can win awards.

T:[...] When people say you're good at things do you always believe them?

Steve: (shakes head) Sometimes.

T: When do you believe them?

Steve: When I know it's good.

T: And how do you know it's good?

Steve: I just do. (9B2FGC4)

Mostly, however, they locate the obstacles to learning in themselves, and seem to have a sense of themselves as having no control over this. Lorna construes herself as having a poor memory (SE), which means that the ambition to produce language from their own heads is frustrated:

> Lorna: [...] ...when he just says write a conversation I don't know what to write. (9B2FGC2)

Lorna knows that she daydreams too. She highlights the gap between her advice on how to learn and her own lack of willpower:

> Lorna: I don't really find them difficult but sometimes I just start daydreaming and miss what teacher has to say. And don't listen to instructions and then when I come to what you have to do I don't know... (9B2FGC2)

There is a strong sense of frustration that they are not able to live up to their construction of a good learner, and that they have insufficient control over themselves to do anything about this. When asked who needs to change the most in order for them to learn languages better, this was the only group where all identified themselves. Despite the fact that they also said soon afterwards that they would like to do better (though they had not produced any clear rationale for their motivation apart from not wanting to move to the lower set), they found it very difficult to change:

T: [...] Is it easy to change?

All: No

Mick: Some of it you've been doing all your life so to change it's really hard. (9B2FGC2)

This almost tragic self-construction is echoed with almost one voice at the end of the final meeting, when asked why they thought they had been selected to participate:

T: Why do you think you were selected?

Lorna: Because we're people ...

Mick: ... that can do well ...

Lorna: but we don't want to ...

Mick: but we don't push usselves...

Lorna: We're not trying hard enough.

T: Do you all think that?

All: Yea. (Becky nods more vigorously than ever!) (10B2FGC6)

6.5.1. Summary of person knowledge (9B2)

This group has a clear set of beliefs about the role of the learner in the learning process, constructing him/her as having responsibility for and almost full control over learning. Unfortunately, their frustration shines through as they point out the gaps between these beliefs and their own knowledge about themselves as learners. There is a sense that they wish to change, that they would like to learn languages, but that they feel powerless to do so, not because of external forces but because of their own weaknesses. They have high expectations, and display a readiness for self-management, but they feel the

need for support with self-regulatory skills, specifically how to remember language and put it together creatively.

These pupils appear to have a strong belief in internal locus of control, though this is frustrated by their strong internal attribution of constraints on their learning. In other words, they believe that they should control learning but have no idea of how to go about this, and thus believe that such attributional factors are stable. Perhaps they need the opportunity to be able to articulate their specific learning needs more openly, and to develop metacognitive skills.

6.6. REFLECTIONS: NAMING THE GROUPS

I had begun these conversations with some scepticism about the usefulness of comparing the four groups, given the subjective ways in which the pupils were selected with regard to motivation. After analysing the background and motivations of the groups in the first part of this analysis, I was not surprised that motivation was not clear-cut. However, analysis of person knowledge has surprised me as the differences between the four groups (and the unit of analysis is the group rather than the individual) are striking. What also surprises me is the inner coherence within the groups. Of course there are differences and disagreements, but overall they do appear to fit together. What cannot be known, of course, is whether this was the case outside the focused group conversation context, or if they were constructed entirely within the meetings. Limited evidence would suggest both; clearly the pupils are drawing on their own prior knowledge and their own beliefs which may have been developed through different kinds of experiences. Equally clearly, however, the

development of constructions within each meeting and over the six meetings appears to draw on the pupils' increased confidence, which may be related to their increasing awareness of what is safe to say within that group.

As I analysed the groups in terms of person knowledge, I was struck by something not only in what they were expressing but also how they were expressing it, which brought specific names to mind for each of the groups. The innocent, trusting, naïve but earnest voices of 9A1 were for me the voices of Grafters. They know they need to work hard, and do so on the whole, but the ways in which they work do not always mean that progress is fast or satisfying, which can lead to boredom. The chaotic, shouting, disconnected voices of 9A2 were the voices of Angry Victims. For them, school is a battleground, where everything conspires against them, and where the only source of satisfaction, or self-esteem, is through open confrontation. The confident, articulate, expert voices of 9B1 were the voices of Sophisticates. They know best what needs to be done, and, provided that everything lives up to their standards, know that they will succeed. The confused, confusing, tragic voices of 9B2 were the voices of the Frustrated. They know what they should be doing, but simply cannot live up to this, feeling powerless to influence their own behaviours.

Considering voice as a construction of control over learning, a further aspect of the nature of these voices also emerged from the analysis at this stage, which polarised them according to positive and negative, inward and outward. In ways described above, the Grafters could be construed as having positive, inwardly turned voices, in that they see that they can control learning if they

can control themselves. The Angry Victims have negative, outwardly turned voices, meaning that they perceive themselves as having no control over learning, and that only external changes will make a difference. The Sophisticates have positive, outwardly turned voices, and are confident that they can control their own learning and prepared to demand support from others when needed. The Frustrated can be seen as having negative, inwardly turned voices, feeling powerless to influence learning, but with all of the reasons for this located within themselves.

At this stage only a partial picture of attribution was emerging, though this would become more complete by the end of the research. I reflected, however, that, broadly speaking, it could be suggested that, for the Grafters and the Frustrated, constraints on learning are attributed internally and are seen as stable, whereas for the Angry Victims and the Sophisticates, they are attributed externally, stable for the Angry Victims, unstable for the Sophisticates. What this said about the relationships between autonomy and motivation was as yet unclear.

Finally, at this stage of the research, it is interesting to review the potential for autonomy between the four groups. Defining autonomy as self-regulation and self-management, it can be suggested already that both knowledge and awareness of self-regulation and self-management are absent in the Angry Victims, that both are present to a large extent in the Sophisticates, that the Grafters have a naïve awareness of self-regulation and self-management which largely satisfies them, and that the Frustrated have similar awareness of self-

regulation to the Grafters, but a more complex understanding of self-management which contributes to their higher expectations of themselves and leads to poor satisfaction levels. This may contribute to the latter group's feeling that they are not meeting their potential.

7. ANALYSIS: TASK KNOWLEDGE

7.1. INTRODUCTION

Drawing on Flavell (1979, 1981), Wenden (1996: 235) defines task knowledge on two levels: "general knowledge about the subject matter of learning and the way to approach it and specific knowledge about the nature and demands of a particular task". According to Wenden's (2001) study of metacognitive knowledge, task knowledge is the most complex of the three categories of person, task and strategic knowledge, involving knowledge about purpose, type and demands, and skills of analysis and monitoring. This knowledge is then used to enable the learner to select a learning task, suggesting that self-management decisions involved in planning, monitoring and evaluating learning are all based on task knowledge (Wenden, 1995). As such, it is important to gain insights into the knowledge base of learners with regard to the broad and narrow understandings of task. In particular, earlier chapters of this thesis have drawn attention to the question of whether learners know not only what they are doing, but also why, and how this relates to their motivation to learn.

The protocols for FGC3 and FGC4 (See Appendix 5 and 6) were designed to explore constructions of language learning and language learning tasks respectively. Though the overall focus of each protocol varied, there was also overlap where it was decided that this would facilitate articulation of these constructions. In addition, data is drawn from other conversations, in particular FGC6.

Once again, each group is analysed in turn. The first part of each analysis focuses on the pupils' general constructions of language learning, i.e. what it is and what the purpose is. This is approached via a range of research tools (see protocols), including brainstorming, concept mapping, a questionnaire and projective techniques. By asking pupils to imagine a languages classroom of the future, for example, insights are gained into what pupils believe language learning should really be like, and this is complemented by a discussion about the content of the languages curriculum in FGC6. The final section of this first part includes data collected mainly in FGC4, offering insights into the pupils' own constructions of the overall language learning process as it is manifested in their classes, and their preferences in terms of whole class, group or independent work. The analysis of these constructions in particular offers an opportunity to understand motivational issues such as relatedness, for example with regard to how the language learning experience in school relates to the pupils' beliefs about the nature and purposes of language learning.

The second part of each analysis focuses on pupils' constructions of language learning tasks. This will include a focus on the nature of choice, including the pupils' rationale for choosing particular tasks (if they do choose), offering further insights into how this may contribute to the pupils' sense of control over their learning.

Drawing on the analysis of person knowledge, this section begins to differentiate between knowledge and beliefs. Knowledge is viewed as that

which is within their close experience of language learning in school, whereas beliefs describe broader personal theories of what language learning should be like. It is, however, beyond the parameters of this research to speculate where these beliefs may have originated.

7.2. TASK KNOWLEDGE: THE GRAFTERS

7.2.1. The Grafters' task knowledge (general)

For the Grafters, language learning is a practical task, which enables the learner primarily to speak another language and understand what someone is saying, useful in transactional situations such as getting lost abroad and emergencies, rather than for activities such as reading stories or watching films. It is therefore particularly important to learn how to ask questions, though Louis claims several times that these are not taught:

> Louis: [...] they just tell you t'answers, they don't... 'cause like if you went up to a person and you wanted to ask a question you wouldn't know how to because they just give yer t'answer. They don't give you t'question. (9A1FGC2)

It is different from other subjects in that the language is different as well as classroom practices, such as use of repetition which is considered by the group as positive because "it gets into your head" (Louis, 9A1FGC2). Language learning is construed as a difficult task, however, with listening being a particularly difficult skill. The pupils therefore suggest that it is best started "when you are a baby" as soon as "you can understand" (Helen and Carol, 9A1FGC1). Some languages are more difficult than others too, so pupils should be offered a choice, including Italian and Spanish.

The main reason for learning a language is to travel or live abroad, to visit friends or family or to spend holidays. There is also a possibility of living abroad or using it in some jobs, such as translators, receptionists and "holiday reps". For this reason, Carl suggests that languages should not be compulsory, as he does not consider them relevant to pupils in this school:

> Carl: Cos you're not exactly like going to go working over there are you. Not like us. Well, I don't think we will anyway. So if we learn it all and don't do anything about it, it's a waste of time isn't it? (9A1FGC1)

However Helen suggests that pupils should also be able to learn "their own" language, as "people come from different places don't they?" (9A1FGC1), and expresses an interest in learning one of these languages herself.

When asked to think about the languages syllabus, the pupils seem satisfied with the order in which they had covered different topics. They find it useful and motivating to begin by learning how to describe their own lives. However, the following comment about what else they should learn in Y7 suggests an interesting insight into the learning process:

> Helen: Difficult topics and that.
>
> *T: Why do you think you should do that at the beginning?*
>
> Helen: Because if you come across a difficult thing then you sort it out, then it takes more weeks up, then you'll be able to do t'easy things in less time [...] And if you learn all t'difficult things, at the beginning, you'll like remember them and then just come back to them in the middle or something. (10A1FGC6)

An example of a difficult topic was "sentences...so you can remember all them little words and that" (Helen, 10A1FGC6).

Though satisfied with the topics, by Y10 the pupils are nevertheless disappointed by what they are able to do with the language, and appear to have had unrealistic expectations of their ability to converse:

> Helen: I would have expected to learn a bit more.
>
> [...]
>
> *T: What would you expect to be able to do that you can't now?*
>
> Carol: Have a conversation without having your book.
>
> Louis: or stuttering.
>
> Helen: Try and speak a full conversation with somebody else in French with no English. Like cos when your teacher says, have a conversation in French, you do it in English cos you don't know the words.
>
> *T: Do other people feel you would have expected to know more?*
>
> Carl: Yea. (10A1FGC6)

According to the group, they learn very little about France or Germany and, though they do not feel strongly about this, they suggest the following topics: towns (on video) and "which are the best parts" (Helen), shops, money (which they have never seen in school), fashions, alcohol, and "culture", construed by Peter as "people, statues...".

When asked to design a languages classroom of the future (in FGC3), their ideas were similar to their current experience, including resources for independent learning, though they did suggest a 'digital wordsign', i.e. "them signs where words go across".

When asked to develop a concept map of the way in which a unit of language learning is organised, this group is able to construct a sequence of activities moving from teacher-centred to independent work, though the pupils learning French described a much more sterile presentation of new language than the Germanists. They were able to identify advantages and disadvantages of whole-class, group and individual work and, although they found that teacher-led activities had greater potential for 'fun' (especially flashcard work), none of them said that this was their preferred way of working (two preferred group work and three individual work). A possible explanation for this is to be found in their difficulties with concentration, which links with their appreciation of variety, with clear breaks between different activities. They also comment frequently that teachers talk too much, which means that they "switch off" (Helen, 10A1FGC6). One cause of this, in their perception, is that teachers do not answer their questions effectively:

T: Is there any of these that you really don't like doing?

[...]

H: Listening to t'teacher ramble on.

[...]

Carl: Cos they go on too much.

[...]

Helen: They just repeat t'same stuff and it gets a bit boring.

[...]

T: [...] Is there anything you really hate or you just don't like any of them?

Peter: Yeah – asking questions.

Carol: Yeah cos you ask one small question and they go through it all o'er again.

Helen: And I don't like copying down...not in all t'lessons.

T: [...] I suppose they're repeating things because they think you don't understand. Do you think there's another way they could get round that?

Carol: They could just listen to us and answer that one question.

Helen: They could do sheets like – they could do some sheets, and each like section telling you something, t'main points about it and that...that you don't understand...t'main words. (9A1FGC4)

Helen's suggestion of reference sheets corresponds with some of the group's liking for independent work, which allows them to "get their work done", without being distracted, and with greater understanding. For Nadia, it also allows the teachers to understand and monitor more accurately their pupils' learning:

T: What's the point of the independent work then? Why do you do it like that?

Nadia: Cos then it gives teachers an idea about how you're going on, cos when the whole class is doing it teachers don't know whether they're like saying it and whether they understand it, and when you do independent work they know. (9A1FGC3)

7.2.2. The Grafters' task knowledge (specific tasks)

When asked to describe the kind of tasks they carry out independently, these pupils immediately begin by categorising them according to listening, speaking, reading and writing. They then proceed to brainstorm these tasks, mentioning eight speaking tasks (six of which are whole-class activities), six writing tasks, two reading tasks and two listening tasks. Following this, pupils

are asked to consider what they would like to be able to do in the foreign language, and are offered a list of specific skills to stimulate the discussion (see Appendix 6). Most of these they find very important, and they add some general skills themselves (understand people, have a conversation) as well as some specific topics (sex, drugs). Unfortunately, the only task pupils are able to identify which matches up with these specific skills is letter writing, and the pupils are not able to propose any additional independent learning tasks.

Responses to the question regarding how they choose task to do in independent work (FGC4) also offer no insight into pupils' understanding of the specific purpose of tasks. Most pupils admit to choosing the easiest tasks, even when they know they are capable of more demanding ones, in order to get gold slips. Louis (eager to move into the upper set) disagrees with this, saying that he prefers "harder ones...it's more of a challenge...you get more into it". In most cases, however, decisions are not made in relation to any objectives. Peter simply does "whatever comes out of the box", and Helen chooses according to what she has not done.

There is some indication that the content of the tasks may be significant in a later conversation when all agree with Carol 's comment on motivation:

> Carol: If it's about like, say something like a sport, like, then you're going to want to know more about it, but if it's like a subject that you don't like at all you, you wouldn't be bothered, would you, if you didn't understand. (10A1FGC5)

It appears that, for at least some of these pupils, it is important to have some level of choice in what they are learning. In support of independent learning, Helen says:

> Helen: [...] It's cos it's like different from listening to t'teacher. You can, say if you've got a choice between things, you can pick a choice, which you'd like prefer, whereas like if she says, right you're doing some tasks, you might not want to do that [...] (10A1FGC6)

However, Carl and Peter's comments suggest that such choice needs to be real and based on an understanding of why the task is being chosen for it to be motivating.

> Carl: You couldn't choose though, could you? You could choose what tasks she wanted you to do.
>
> Helen: She puts them on the board and then you choose out of them.
>
> *T: Was that a bit closer though to this idea of you helping to plan what you want to do in your lessons?*
>
> Peter: No, it just bored us. It bored me anyway.
>
> *T: Right. Why was that?*
>
> Peter: I don't know. It just used to be like, getting us task out o' t'box, get a mark for it and then just get bored with it. (10A1FGC6)

As well as basing his choice of tasks on how easy they are in order to gain praise, Carl does not construe his experiences of independent work as involving real choice at all, but rather to be yet another form of teacher control. Peter, who has earlier claimed to prefer working on his own, but also to selecting tasks at random, does not enjoy doing the tasks which are seen as a mechanistic activity, without purpose.

7.3. TASK KNOWLEDGE: THE ANGRY VICTIMS

7.3.1. The Angry Victims' task knowledge (general)

In order to understand how these pupils construe language learning, it was first of all necessary to listen to their perceptions of the teachers, as these appear to dominate any construction of language learning, so that with one teacher it could be a funny experience, but with others (indeed most) it was not. Language learning is construed by 9A2 largely as a negative. The pupils agree with Candice that it is "a load of crap" which involves the pupil in writing meaningless words:

> Candice: You don't even know what you're writing in your book. It's like you're just looking through, and they tell you to write and like you can't cos you don't know what it means. (10A2FGC6)

It consists of bewildering processes which, for the pupils, say more about the teacher than about learning. For example, the new French teacher, who is Welsh, apparently asks the class for the meaning of French words because she herself is inadequate in English:

> Candice: Like, she'll ask us what it means. Like she'll say it in French and then we have to look it up for her in English. She's not English, she doesn't know any English, hardly any English, does she? (9A2FGC5)

This extends to the content of language learning as seen through the topics, which are either not clear to them or introduced in an apparently random sequence. This is construed by the pupils as a result of lack of teacher organisation, leading to chaos:

> Candice: [...] I don't even know what topic I'm doing now.
>
> [...]
>
> Penny: The teachers should be organised as well.

[...]

T: You said organized as well?

> Penny: Yea, that's what Miss C was like. She knew what she were on about but everything was all o'er t'show. We were doing cars one minute and t'next minute beds, bedrooms and that. And that's what our Y7 and 8 were like. She weren't organised enough. That's why all she did was give you sheets, level 1 and that, she didn't know what she was doing so she just handed sheets out every lesson. Then it just ended up being a riot in the class. We didn't get any work done whatsoever. (10A2FGC6)

Language learning is also a monotonous experience, in which copying is the main characteristic:

> Penny: Everything's boring. How they explain. Everything's boring. We do t' same over and over again. We do like, t'same page of writing all the time and we already know it and they go through it again and make you all copy it out again, so you've got it about five times written all out in your book. T' same things over and over again.

T: That's really interesting. Can you think of an example?

> Penny: In transport, like a bus means whatever, or a train. We'll do that one lesson and then the next lesson it will be still be on the board so we'll do that again, and then it's do that again and then do that but put something else underneath it. (9A2FGC3)

For Candice, therefore, the most important aspect of language learning is to "try to write French down properly" (9A2FGC2). In the pupils' perception of their experience, little speaking is involved in language learning. Languages are also very difficult, "cos you just can't learn it in two seconds" (Darren, 9A2FGC2), and as such better learnt at a younger age and as an option.

When asked to consider the purposes of language learning, however, the pupils speak in terms of contacts with speakers of other languages, largely through speech. Luke even admits to having relatives in Spain, and others speak of

other potential contacts, though there is some suggestion that they will never use another language themselves as they do not speak to native speakers even when they are abroad. Given this, it is pointless learning how to use the telephone, for example, as they would never do that in Spain, apart from phoning an English person.

If anything, Spanish is a more useful language to learn, as they are more likely to go to Spain than France or Germany and because more people in the world speak Spanish. Indeed, for these pupils, a languages syllabus would enable pupils "to choose the language that we want to learn" (Penny, 10A2FGC6), possibly on the basis of experience of more than one (Candice, 10A2FGC6).

When asked to think about the content of the syllabus, the group begins by listing topics they already do. When they move onto food, this sets in chain a conversation in which deeper-seated beliefs are revealed. They begin by suggesting that it would be better to learn how to say the kinds of food which they usually eat, such as McDonalds, and they become quite animated at the possibility of ordering pizza over the telephone. This eventually leads to a remarkable discussion which is worth quoting at length as it contains much evidence that listening to the pupils' voices offers useful and sometimes unexpected insights into the ways in which they construe the purposes of language learning and the ways in which they could be actively involved in this if authentic experiences could be offered. It also reveals a more positive construction of Germany than has been expressed until this moment:

Penny: Have German people coming in every so often.

Darren: Yeah have German people coming in.

Candice: Have an interview with them.

Penny: Yeah, interview. And see what they think. Or about three of 'em in. And you just have to write what they're on about.

[...]

Penny: I wouldn't start bringing German people in till about Year 9 cos then you know, well not everything, but most things.

Candice: Well I think we should have a residential trip, as a languages group in France. Like a weekend.

Penny: I think we should have trips and stuff.

Candice: For like a weekend, a week.

Penny: That'd be mad that! Just learning German all week. I think you'd learn a lot actually. And we had to speak in German. And you had to copy out t'dictionary.

T: Would you do it?

Penny: Aye. I would. I fancy doing it!

T: But you don't like German so why would you spend a week doing German?

Candice: Cos it's fun!

Penny: I don't know. I like sausages!

Luke: Them sausages are horrible!

Penny: They're not!

T: But Candice, if you don't like French ...

Candice: I think it'd be fun!

T: ...wouldn't your idea of spending a weekend speaking French be a nightmare?

Penny: Yeah, if you went on one of them weekends and you had to make your own food and that and you had to go and buy it yourself and ask in t'new money. That'd be right fun!

Candice: Summat different.

Darren: Yeah, but half of 'em would start speaking English.

Candice: Yeah but you could say, if you speak English then you've got to go back home.

Penny: Yeah, you'd just have to copy out o' t'dictionary. [...]

Candice: Or you have to sleep on your own.

Penny: And then you have a disco. Gotta have a disco at t'end of it.

Candice: And you have to go to t'thingy.

Penny: German theme parks. They're wicked them. Have you seen t'rides what are in Germany? Right good 'uns. (10A2FGC6)

Having finally managed to move away from the pupils positioning themselves in opposition to the teachers, we find potential for greater motivation. We even find an awareness (amongst some of them) that stereotypes are due to ignorance:

Penny: You don't even see them. It'd be better like actually seeing them.

Candice: Yeah, see what t'actual people are like because they call German's nazis and things like that.

Luke: They're bloody krauts aren't they?

T: Do you feel that you don't know much about what they are like?

Penny: You don't know what Germans are like do you really. (10A2FGC6)

Finally the discussion moves onto a suggestion that "we should be taught what we know", such as "relationships and just things like that what we know" (Candice, 10A2FGC6), and the expectation that they should be able to have a fluent conversation:

> Penny: Talk proper full-on German. I'd like to do that, talk full-on German. It'd be right good that.
>
> *T: Talk what?*
>
> Candice: Full-on German.
>
> [...]
>
> Penny: They don't learn you enough do they? (10A2FGC6)

When asked to design their classroom of the future in FGC3, the pupils not surprisingly dispense with the teacher, replacing her with televisions and computers which offer immediate help when required. What is very revealing is the need for immediate contact with situations in which they are able to communicate, as revealed by the group's proposals for a German switchboard displaying information about vacancies, friends and penpals, and "one of them virtual realities (pointing at his drawing) so you can go to Germany and things" (Darren, 9A2FGC3).

Pupils' descriptions of the way in which teachers introduce new language at the start of a unit of work again reveal the gulf between teacher objectives and pupil understanding of the classroom processes. Candice construes her French teacher's actions as pointless:

> Candice: [...] We just write them down and she'll just get some more...and she'll tell us to write them down...and she'll repeat herself and repeat herself and repeat herself, that's all she does, repeat herself. She does your head in! (9A2FGC3)

The pupils do not suggest, however, that they want easy work, but simply work they can do. Penny and Candice actually complain that one teacher made the work too easy for them, and that this also led to problems in the classroom:

> Penny: When we had Miss C she used to give us work that a one year old could do or summat. It was too easy so everybody started trashing t'classroom and that. We did, chucking paper and pencils at her, all t'lads did. T'work were that easy!
>
> Candice: Done it by t'time she'd handed 'em all out! (9A2FGC3)

This depressing picture of a classroom contrasts with Penny's more positive memories of a former teacher, with whom she feels she had a good relationship:

> Penny: We did cards, she writ them on the board, showed us loads in t' book and then just said, do such and such and then copy them down and then talk, or whatever you want to do after. And then she'd start dancing for us or maybe got the video out. (9A2FGC3)

When able to identify more positive experiences, the pupils are even able to discuss complex issues such as target language use, though, as can be seen here, not always with consistency:

> Candice: You know like, when you do t'register and you have to say 'oui madame'. Well she doesn't! You just say 'here' and she doesn't say nought! And I think that's right sad cos I think you should act and speak all in French and that.
>
> Penny: You shouldn't *have* to. We say 'here'. We don't have to say it in German.
>
> *T: But you think it would be better if you did?*
>
> Candice: Yeah. She doesn't learn us nowt!
>
> Penny: You know one o' t'classes, as soon as they walk into t'language classroom they're not allowed to speak English at all. They did it wi' us a couple o' years ago. It were all right

actually – a bit hard for us, but you got done if you spoke English. You had to speak German all t'time. (10A2FGC6)

These pupils express a dislike for whole-class work as they claim not to know what is going on. Luke believes they "get more work done" (Luke) in independent work though they find this more difficult as they are not supposed to talk. Generally, although pairwork and groupwork are not allowed very much in their lessons, it is the preferred way of learning as they can "put ideas together" (Luke) (9A2FGC3).

7.3.2. The Angry Victims' task knowledge (specific tasks)

This group is not clear about the nature and purpose of tasks, even confusing them with tests:

T: What's a task?

Darren: It's a sheet that has questions and stuff on.

Penny: Yea, answer questions what you haven't even been taught how to say.

Candice: They're like in us test where like you listen for t'questions.

Penny: You get stuff in the test that you haven't even gone through, what they haven't even told us about and they put it in the tests and then shout at you for not knowing it.

T: Is it a test, or is it a task, a practice thing?

Penny: No, it's a test and it's just tasks innit! They don't tell you what to do. (9A2FGC3)

For these pupils, the tasks are yet another piece of evidence that they do not know what they are doing, thanks to the poor teaching they have had. They find them difficult to do individually and form support groups within the classroom to deal with this:

> Candice: We can't work as individuals because like we get stuck and she'll not help you. She'll like just go...(gestures)
>
> *T: Do you ever work in pairs?*
>
> All: No (response generated!).
>
> P: I'm not allowed ... some of us aren't allowed to.
>
> [...]
>
> P: All us seven, like, on t' two rows, we all do exactly the same thing because we all just have to help each other because we don't know what to do. (9A2FGC3)

When asked in the following meeting to describe what they do in the tasks, the first responses are "copy", and then they revert back to the teacher who "never teaches us ought – she just shouts at us!" (Penny, 9A2FGC4). Eventually Candice recalls that they used to do them with another teacher. Together the pupils describe tasks covering the four language skills, but only manage to recall two listening (Language Master and listening to the teacher reading), two speaking (Language Master and pairwork), two reading (wordsearches and crosswords), and two writing tasks (copying from the board or the textbook, and making posters). The discussion list of specific purposes for language learning produces more negative than positive responses, though those involving contact with foreign people are considered more important, offering an earlier insight into some of the more positive comments made in FGC6. Unfortunately, pupils are unable to see any connection between any of these purposes and the actual tasks done (apart from shopping), and are also unable to think of alternative tasks.

The question regarding reasons for choosing specific tasks is somewhat redundant given that the pupils say that they hardly ever do them. When they do independent work, however, they either have no choice ("They just give them to you", Luke, 9A2FGC4), or they choose the easiest tasks, or they choose randomly (9A2FGC4).

There is some suggestion that content is important. Tasks aimed at reading newspapers are pointless ("Don't even read them o'er here!" Luke, 9A2FGC4), and others are perceived as more difficult (e.g. Penny finds pets easier than bedrooms 9A2FGC5).

However, choice is important to these pupils, as revealed in this next extract:

> Penny: What they wanna do is...do you know that target sheet, they should have one of them and say like we've got to do all level 1 and all the level 2 and all the level 3; you've got to do that and I'll give you two months to do it, summat like that, you know every lesson. Then you could pick and do it in turn like that; do it from t'hardest to the easiest or whatever. Pick what you want so you don't have like t'same, t'hardest all the time. So you could mix 'em up. It would be done quicker that way.
>
> *T: What would make you do it more quickly that way?*
>
> Penny: I don't know. And I could do some o' t'hard ones first and then do t'quick one, I don't know, because I could choose what I want. Ones what I fancy.
>
> Candice: I think it is easier...
>
> Penny: Like a listening, or reading or writing.
>
> Candice: ...if you choose what you want to do like. If they have a list and say...
>
> Penny: Still do t'same in the topic and that, but give you sheets and say, pick whatever you want. We used to do it...
>
> Candice: Will you shurrup talking!

Penny: No, I'm talking! And we did loads of work.

Candice: If they like put a list up and you had to pick one. That would be good that, cos you are picking what you want to do not what the teachers' tell you to do. You're doing all different to all t'other people, and I think it's a change.

T: Would you not just sit and have a chat?

Candice: No.

Penny: And that would make you learn more because usually if you are doing all t'sheet, all the class are doing the sheet, you don't know what to do so you just copy off somebody else. But then if you're doing all different, you can't really then. (10A2FGC6)

Luke and Darren both agreed with the points made in this conversation, which suggests a clear need for real opportunities for choice according to criteria such as language skill and level, and an understanding of classroom dynamics. It also suggests, however, the need to support pupils' choices by reinforcing the rationale for choice in general and for choice of specific task.

7.4. TASK KNOWLEDGE: THE SOPHISTICATES

7.4.1. The Sophisticates' task knowledge (general)

This group construes language learning very broadly. For these pupils, language learning can have instrumental purposes. It can be used in the present on school exchanges and residential trips (and even on day trips if they were organised) or to help their parents get by on holiday, and it can also be related to future aspirations:

Mark: We're more like involved in Europe now and like when you get a job a lot of people deal with foreign countries so it can help you when you want a job. (9B1FGC1)

However, Jodie reveals that for her it is also intrinsically worthwhile, as it is different from other subjects "cos you're speaking a foreign language and it's something new to you" (Jodie, 9B1FGC3). For the Sophisticates, a language can also have intrinsic qualities, and be pleasurable (or not) because of the sound, as revealed in a lengthy discussion in FGC3:

> Jodie: It sounds right nice when you speak it. Sounds right good... I think it's easier than German cos it sounds nice and you want to speak it but Germans are all (spitting noise)... (9B1FGC1)

French and German are nevertheless construed as difficult to learn: learners bring no prior knowledge to the subject unlike in other subjects ("like you're starting from scratch when you start learning German" (Jimmy, 9B1FGC3)); it involves thinking about two languages (Jodie); and the language itself is complex:

> Jimmy: You know like we have 'their' and 'there' with two different spellings, German has one of them for every word, like there's three different types of 'the'. Three different types of 'a', ein, einen and eine. Gets you all confused when you're only used to one. (9B1FGC3)

It is also something which parents do not know, making homework difficult.

Jodie has high expectations of her linguistic capabilities which she believes she cannot meet as the subject is too difficult:

> Jodie: No, it's just going to confuse you if you read German and French news. You can do it quite well but you can't do it excellently. (9B1FGC4)

For this group, as with the others, the main purpose is to be able to speak, and this should be the focus of learning:

> Jodie: If you go to France...
>
> Annie: ...you need to be able to speak.
>
> Jodie: ...and you go into a shop you can't write something down and hold it up. You've just got to ask them. But if you get a job when you're older and you're speaking on t'phone and ordering stuff to somebody abroad, you've got to speak to them, you can't write it down. (9B1FGC2)

This construction of what is really needed in instrumental terms is expanded when the pupils suggest that pupils should be taught how to deal with emergencies at a much younger age, and that this will not appear strange provided the teacher explains the purpose to the class (9B1FGC4).

Jodie suggests another purpose for language learning when she argues with Jimmy about the importance of being able to make foreign guests welcome when they come to England:

> Jodie: They might be coming over to sell you some pants or summat and you want to welcome them so you get a special offer. It's not always that they come to work here. (9B1FGC4)

However, too much concentration on instrumental purposes may be counterproductive. Jodie tells us that her brother and his girlfriend who had taken GCSE two years earlier have forgotten everything now and would not use it even if they went to France "because they'll look stupid" (10B1FGC6). In any case, it is not essential as most people speak English:

> Jimmy: There's that many talking English.
>
> Jodie All t'French people and everybody talk English so... It's good to learn a language but you don't need it really. (10B1FGC6)

This provides further evidence that Jodie's motivation is not purely instrumental. Jimmy also states:

> Jimmy: Well you wouldn't be able to socialise if you couldn't speak the language, would you? (9B1FGC4)

Possibly referring to his own experience with his parents' bilingualism, Mark introduces an integrative perspective in his contribution to this conversation when he suggests that speaking the language facilitates the development of relationships:

> Mark: [...] Cos when you go abroad, like Spanish people especially, if you can make one word in a language they'll talk to you in fluent English. But if you just try and make them talk to you in English they just pretend that they don't know what you're talking about. It's t'same in all t'countries. (10B1FGC6)

This perspective occurs again when the group is asked to think about the Y7 languages curriculum, suggesting that more general conversation and less transactional language would be useful:

> Mark: I think general conversation, I don't think you do enough because if you met someone...because you're more likely to talk to a younger person than you are an adult and I don't think you learn enough to be able to say something to someone. All you learn is hello, how are you and that's it. You don't learn enough to take your conversation further.
>
> *T: And what would the conversation be about?*
>
> Mark: Just to be able to talk to them in general.
>
> Jodie: Like, have you seen that over there? Do you think that's good? Do you like hotdogs?
>
> [...]
>
> Jodie: [...] We just seem to focus on going to a tourist office, things that you're never ever going to do.
>
> Mark: As a child you wouldn't really go into a tourist place and ask for information. (10B1FGC6)

Suggested alternative content would support this by providing the learners with knowledge about the countries, such as history, geography and general knowledge (monuments, footballers etc) to enable them to have a conversation:

> Mark: In France, people are going to talk about what's happened before in their country and you don't understand. You're never even told things that happened. [...]
>
> Jimmy: I think if we had two lessons a week and we had one on like the actual language and one on the background of the country or something. [...] like learn history in Y7, 8 and 9, or you could, like geography, you could take French geography, or German geography.
>
> Jodie: Learn where places are, where places are situated and stuff like that. Cos you can't use it without. (10B1FGC6)

The group's vision of language learning begins in primary, where they believe that taster courses would enable them to "get started straightaway" in secondary school, enable them to learn more (Jodie, 9B1FGC4) and reduce the stress of coping with a new subject:

> Jimmy: Yea, when people come in and learn a new language, it's difficult. It's too hard for me now wi' all t'stuff that we're doing. They move too fast. (9B1FGC4)

Their classrooms of the future revealed a need for direct contact with people in other countries. Unlike the Angry Victims, they did not picture a teacher-free classroom, though the teacher appears to take on a monitoring role (using a 'master control') whilst learners work flexibly and independently in soundproofed booths on a range of tasks, including working with videos and 'fact-files' about the countries, and with the aid of computers to help them learn. They envisage various ways of establishing immediate contact with the target language countries: a helicopter to take them to different countries; immediate 'phone-to-phone' contact with France or Germany; and a

'transporter' which "whisks you off to anywhere in the world – like Star Trek" (Jimmy), though Annie more realistically suggests that it can only go to the country of the language they are learning, and that the teacher has an access code so that they cannot send each other away. For Jodie this 'transporter' becomes a time machine to help them to learn about historical figures.

In the concept mapping activity, this group reveals a sophisticated grasp of the language learning cycle, including details about the different purposes of their exercise books and a recognition that they need to revisit language constantly in order to revise it (an objective construed as boring repetition by others). In fact, they complain that in Y9 there is not enough recapitulation. In this next conversation, they reveal their belief that it is important to take time to become familiar with language, and emphasise the need for lessons to be driven by pupils' learning rather than by the syllabus. They are aware that teachers themselves are constrained by external requirements, but suggest that focusing too much on these can be counterproductive:

> Jimmy: [...] They pile more and more work on you before you've learned the last things. We've not finished one topic and they just push you onto the next one. So they can get the 'National Curriculum' (he makes quotation gesture) done!
>
> Jodie: In Y8 we did each topic for like a month or so. They just drummed it into you. And all t'stuff from Y8 I can remember, but t'stuff from Y9 it's like you do like Lost Property and we'll write it all out and then t'next day we'll be onto going places or summat like that, and it doesn't sink in.
>
> Annie: In Y8 she used to do cards, flashcards, and do it every time.
>
> [...]
>
> Jodie: Yeah, it's better not to cover as much and know it than cover everything and not know it.

> Annie: We did do more, but we knew it all cos we got to do it all t'time.
>
> [...]
>
> Jimmy: I know teachers have to do the National Curriculum, teach it all, but I think they should just cut the National Curriculum down, take the most important bits out of it and spend more time teaching that [...] (9B1FGC3)

This is exacerbated in Y10 by GCSE requirements:

> Jimmy: You know when t'GCSEs start, all t'teachers start saying, you can't have any of t'fun stuff you had in Y7, 8, 9, there's too much to fill in and that, but I think there is enough, a bit of time left over to make things a bit more fun, so you take it in more. (10B1FGC6)

Possibly for this reason, pupils prefer to be able to work at their own pace, either in groups (preferred by the three girls) or individually (Jimmy finds it annoying when he does all the work in a group and the others sit around and get credit for it) (9B1FGC3), and have choice in what they do. In the next meeting, however, Jimmy suggests that "some kids'll just mess about" in independent work, whereas Jodie talks about the benefits:

> Jodie: I think you learn a lot independently because you're doing it yourself, [...] you go at your own pace and like, when you're copying stuff off o't'board, you're trying to do it neat, you know if it's your red book, but you're going too fast and you can't keep up sometimes. So doing individual tasks, you should be able to like work at your own pace and if you wanna do it, you do it. If you're just gonna mess about, more fool you, you're not learning. So it's your own fault. (9B1FGC4)

7.4.2. The Sophisticates' task knowledge (specific tasks)

When the brainstorm activity about the nature of tasks was introduced, Jimmy responded with characteristic humour ("Have you got another five or six sheets of paper?" (9B1FGC4)).

Although the group did not speak about large numbers of tasks (five speaking, two listening, five reading and three writing), this was because they described them at length and in detail, offering their perspectives very readily. Describing pair work, for example, there is an understanding that the support offered by the written word is intended to be removed eventually, when pupils are able to speak without it. There is also a description of information gap activities. There is other evidence that the tasks are seen in terms of their purposes, and that pupils are able to evaluate them on the basis of authenticity and personal relevance. A discussion about the nature of questions asked after reading passages is one example of this:

> Jodie: [...] ... then read it and then you get questions like, where does Marion go Saturday morning, stuff like that.
>
> Lucy: Pointless questions.
>
> *T: Why do you say they're pointless?*
>
> Jimmy: Because they're not real.
>
> Lucy: Because I just don't like them.
>
> Jimmy: They're boring.
>
> [...]
>
> Jimmy: It's not really that pointless. I think it could be like, say, where does Maria go, you could just be asking your friends where do *you* go on Saturday? It's just a different way of thinking about it, so in a way it's not pointless. Just silly. (9B1FGC4)

Authenticity also extends to the nature of the audience. Annie finds it easier to write letters to her French penfriend than to an imaginary person "because I actually know her and I know what to say to her, so it's easier" (9B1FGC4). Similarly, Jimmy describes a cartoon strip he produced for the local Festival of Languages:

> Jimmy: Once I felt I was really using it when, we were doing this thing for the University and we had to do either a cartoon strip, or a letter. We had this like Star Trek type cartoon strip that got put in the University so I felt that I was really using it. [...] It had to be good so people could understand it. So that was the first time I ever thought I was really using it not just for the sake of it. (9B1FGC4)

The need for authenticity, however, does not extend to listening tasks, with sound effects being criticised because they exacerbate the difficulty related to poor recording quality, and fast speech being perceived as inauthentic:

> Jodie: Yea, but it's like someone who's not trying to slow it down just for you and they're gambolling on, know what I mean? If you go to France they'd slow down for you.
>
> Lucy: Challenging.
>
> *T: So if you think it's more challenging and it's more like if you were in France, is there a point?*
>
> Jodie: There is.
>
> Jimmy: Yes, but it's that muffled that the teacher is going to have to repeat it anyway. And with all t'sounds in t'background...T'transport one has cars and trains in the background and you just can't hear it.
>
> Lucy: I wouldn't mind t'tapes if they were clear...
>
> Jimmy: And they weren't crackling.
>
> Lucy: ...but they're not. (9B1FGC4)

Pupils identify many purposes for using languages, and evaluate tasks according to how helpful to learning they are, though Jimmy reminds us that it is also important that they are enjoyable:

> Jimmy: Put it this way, vegetables are good for you but you never eat them; they're boring. [...] They should be both: good and helpful. If it's fun but not helpful there's no point doing it. If it's helpful but not fun it's too boring. (9B1FGC4)

There is also evidence that the content of individual tasks can be more or less conducive to motivation, e.g. Lucy preferring food to trains (9B1FGC4).

This is the only group to suggest additional tasks, and these involve "finding out as much information as you can about the country" (Jodie, 9B1FGC4) rather than the tourist-eye view which is the only way in which countries are portrayed in textbooks:

> Jodie: They just show you like someone coming across from Europe where someone says 'can I take your hand luggage and case, and stuff like that'. (9B1FGC4)

For this group, decisions about which tasks to do are related to their individual targets:

> Jodie: Yeah, you've got to reach your targets.
>
> Lucy: Like you have this sheet and it's got all t'task numbers on and say, by t'end of this topic you've got to have done seven speakings, five writings and that, and you just choose. (9B1FGC4)

However, this discussion is curtailed by the realisation that they no longer do many tasks in Y9, which most of them regret as they appreciate the benefits of independent learning and the choice that this entails as described above.

7.5. TASK KNOWLEDGE: THE FRUSTRATED

7.5.1. The Frustrated's task knowledge (general)

These pupils construe language learning as an activity which enables communication with speakers of other languages either at home or abroad. However, there is some disagreement about whether or not it is important, as only "like one third out of everybody in t'world's gonna go abroad" (Mick, 9B2FGC1). There is no consensus as to when a language should be learnt, with some suggestion that it can wait until college when the most appropriate language for a particular job (possibly Spanish) can be learnt. There is also a belief that languages can best be learnt through immersion, such as doing work experience abroad, though only Mick would have the confidence to do this ("It'd be like having it all around you all the same time, and you're not having English round you" (10B2FGC6)).

According to these pupils, the most important skill in language learning is speaking. The comparative importance of speaking over writing is neatly expressed by Mick:

> Mick: You can speak writing but you can't like write speaking. If you go abroad you can't write down what you want. You have to say it. (9B2FGC2)

However, language learning in school tends to involve little speaking. In fact, for these pupils, it appears largely to involve writing, and this means mostly copying from the board or writing what they are told to write ("she like holds up cards and you just write what she tells you to" (Mick, 9B2FGC3)), and then, in Y10, revision and tests. In this way, language learning is construed as

different from other subjects, and, especially given this group's desire to produce language from their own heads, less satisfying.

When invited to suggest alternative topics for Y7, the group largely stays with the topics they have covered, "just different order" (Mick, 10B2FGC6), though there is a strong belief that they should do more "normal talk" (Steve), defined by Mick as "have more conversations", such as "talking about what was on last night" (Steve) and "what we did" (Mick). Of course, this would imply an earlier introduction of the past tenses, meaning that "you'd have to get t'word order right I suppose" (Steve), confirming the group's concern with putting the language together creatively. However, by Y10, all state that they would have expected to achieve more by this stage.

In terms of content, Steve would like to do something like history or sport, learning "how the language came about...all the different people and races and that", and Lorna wants to learn about the daily lives of young people (10B2FGC6). They also suggest that watching French television channels would be useful, provided the programmes were similar to the kind they watch in England:

> Lorna: Like soaps but in their country. Where you understand more innit?
>
> Mick: It'd be like t'same what's over here but in German or French. If it's something you know you'll watch.
>
> Lorna: Proper life things what they say and what they do.
>
> Andy: Then you might get more involved in t'work. (10B2FGC5)

The pupils' classroom of the future includes two main features. Firstly, the desire for authentic experience is echoed once again in the incorporation of virtual reality, robot teachers, and computers which "can show you anywhere in the world". Secondly, their frustration at not being able to regulate their own learning in order to remember the language is reflected in this group's suggestions for ways of putting it directly into their heads:

> Steve: You can go into hospital and they'll give you a drug...and you put these helmets on that's full of information, and it just puts it straight into your brain, like leads into your brain through the computers.
>
> *T: Is that while you're asleep?*
>
> Steve: Yeah.
>
> Andy: You're strapped into a chair with a computer all wired to you, and it gives you all t'information. [...]
>
> Mick: You're listening to a tape about French while you're sleeping, and virtual reality, and then there's a computer that links you up to other planets so you can get advice from, from people. (9B2FGC3)

Although these pupils offer detail when discussing the language learning cycle, there is little discussion of why they are doing the various activities, though understanding purpose is important to Steve, "cos if they didn't understand why, they'd just write it down and forget it". Instead they again offer a picture of copying and repeating, which they find pointless. They are aware that this does not engage their brains, which is of course a major concern for this group:

> Andy: You're reading what you write at first and then after a bit you just start copying and you don't read it. (9B2FGC4)

As may be expected then, none of this group prefers whole-class work apart from flashcards. They select independent work as their favourite part of the

cycle, "cos you can do what you want not what the teacher says" (Andy), because "you're thinking about the stuff, that's what teaches you" (Annie), and because "you can work at your own pace – you can just go and get a dictionary to help you" (Lorna) (9B2FGC3).

This group is the only group to introduce a discussion about whether classes should be set according to achievement levels, and this turns into a heated debate in FGC6. Though there is disagreement, with Lorna arguing for sets with flexibility of movement between them, and Steve arguing the merits of mixed classes, there is a general agreement that individual needs must be catered for, and that independent work can be helpful with this.

7.5.2. The Frustrated's task knowledge (specific tasks)

It is interesting that this group, which is so concerned about remembering language, recognises tasks as an opportunity for practising "all the stuff you've been doing" (Steve, 9B2FGC3), "just stuff you know" (Mick). Unfortunately, however, FGC4 was the conversation which was held in difficult circumstances, and this may have led to the poor response to the brainstorming activity about tasks. The pupils were aware of the four skills, but only referred to five task types overall. When asked to consider what purposes they would like to be able to use their languages for, they generally prefer anything which relates to meeting and talking to foreign people, though they offer a number of additional purposes such as reading road signs, sorting out money abroad, asking people questions and listening to important news.

All pupils prefer to be able to make choices about their work, based on level and interest. The level they choose is related to their targets which they enjoy setting for themselves in order to be able to select appropriate ones. Furthermore, Andy says that choice encourages them to work harder (FGC4, FGC6).

In a later conversation, Lorna argues for some teacher involvement in target-setting in order to ensure that they are not choosing tasks which are too easy:

> Lorna: [...] If we were going to do all level ones, and we showed Miss, she'd tell us to do... cos she like knew how clever and that we are, so she told us what to do.
>
> *T: So if she thought that...*
>
> Lorna: you could do better...
>
> *T: [...] Did you prefer working like that then?*
>
> Mick: Yea.
>
> *T: (to Becky) What about you?*
>
> Becky: Yeah. I agree with them. (10B2FGC6)

In fact, Lorna later suggests that she does not enjoy independent learning, which appears somewhat contradictory until she adds that for her it is not always carried out in an organised way such as she describes above, but can lead to "messing about" and "everybody running around trying to find the mark book to mark their own" (10B2FGC6), a problem identified earlier in this conversation and resolved by the suggestion that there is more than one markbook available.

Interest is the other factor involved in choosing tasks, with speaking tasks being considered interesting. Unfortunately, pupils again affirm that they do very few speaking tasks, despite their importance to learning ("cos if you say a word you'll remember it better than writing it down" Andy, 9B2FGC4). They are, however, disparaging of tasks which are perceived as being divorced from reality, such as describing a weekend in terms of "saying what you haven't done - there's not very much point is there?" (Andy, 9B2FGC4). This also includes activities such as shopping, "Cos if you go into a supermarket or something you can just pick it up and put it inside and just carry it with you ..." (Steve, 9B2FGC4).

Despite the lack of authentic, enjoyable tasks, however, there is a general endorsement of independent learning amongst this group, provided it is organised well. As Mark and Steve say:

> Mark: It's makes you feel like they trust you and think that you are responsible.
>
> [...]
>
> Steve: Gives you a bit of freedom, rather then competing with everyone else. (9B2FGC4)

7.6. REFLECTIONS

Though the four groups have quite different constructions of language learning, based on different aspects of acquired task knowledge and beliefs about the nature of language learning, there are some interesting commonalities. Firstly, for all of these groups, language learning is construed as a difficult task. For all except the Grafters (who have modest expectations

and respond to the difficulties with bored resignation), the difficulties seem to lie in the mismatch between their beliefs about what they should be able to do in a language on the one hand, and their knowledge about what they actually learn to do in school. This reinforces the anger of the Angry Victims and the frustration of the Frustrated, and leads the Sophisticates to indignation, appearing to correspond to those aspects of person knowledge which concern their sense of control (or lack of control) over learning. In addition, it may be that expectations of what it is possible to be able to do in a foreign language are linked to pupils' only experience of using a language, namely their mother tongue, and that this contributes to demoralisation and lack or loss of motivation.

Secondly, a broad range of purposes for language learning are articulated by the groups, but they all share a belief in the importance of speaking, albeit in different contexts and in different ways. The Grafters appear to be content with the transactional nature of their learning, though the other groups in various ways and degrees want to learn how to hold conversations with their peers from other countries. Linked to this, some groups propose a radical change in content, enabling them to learn more about the countries of the languages they are learning in order to have something to talk about. The Sophisticates, the Frustrated and, unexpectedly, the Angry Victims appear to be particularly motivated (or in the case of the latter potentially motivated) integratively, with an interest in getting to know young native speakers personally, and this is reflected in their designs for the classroom of the future as well as a desire for authenticity in tasks. Purely instrumental approaches to teaching and learning

could, in such circumstances, contribute to feelings of disappointment, dissatisfaction, and alienation, either because the prospect of travel or work abroad does not relate to the pupils' own lives, or because they believe that such needs can best be fulfilled when they are needed, either to allow for an appropriate choice of language, or to avoid learning something which will be forgotten before it is needed.

Thirdly, there appears to be broad agreement that independent learning is the most useful mode of learning. This does not make it the most popular, of course, as it depends on how much value is placed on the learning itself. Reasons for the usefulness of independent learning vary, and most are related to some form of control: for the Grafters, it is easier to control themselves, as they have problems concentrating when the teacher speaks too much; for the Angry Victims, it is synonymous with working with friends and as such offers an opportunity to be less restricted by the teacher and to find solidarity with allies, either for mutual support with learning or as a respite from boredom; for the Sophisticates, it offers increased responsibility for learning and better opportunities to have individual needs met, for example with regard to pace, thereby enhancing control of learning in terms of both self-management and self-regulation; for the Frustrated, it affords the same advantages as it does for the Sophisticates, and also means that they have to think more about what they are doing, engaging their brains, offering a greater opportunity for control of their cognitive skills.

In terms of differences between the groups, there are clear variations in motivational orientations. The Grafters appear to be mainly instrumentally motivated, though there is a sense that working or living abroad is alien to them. The Angry Victims, despite apparent demotivation, surprisingly reveal integrative tendencies eventually. The Sophisticates reveal strong elements of both intrinsic and integrative motivation, with some instrumental motivation present in a qualified way. The Frustrated surprisingly reveal a strong sense of integrative motivation, though this is frustrated by language learning as it is manifested in school.

Levels of congruence between knowledge and beliefs also vary, though for most groups there is a strong incongruence between what they believe language learning should be about (and what kinds of tasks will contribute to it) and their knowledge of what it is like in their context. This may stem from a need to discuss what can realistically be achieved in school, or from an inappropriate curriculum. The implications of this appear to vary, and may be related to other aspects of their knowledge and beliefs, so it is more appropriate to revisit this at the end of the whole analysis.

Finally, apart from the Sophisticates, most groups appear to have limited understanding of the nature and purpose of individual tasks. With most groups, this appears to correspond to their levels of self-management awareness, although the Frustrated's apparent awareness of the importance of planning and monitoring learning is not matched by their understanding of task purpose.

Perhaps their rudimentary task knowledge is another source of frustration for them.

8. STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE AND OVERALL SUMMARY

8.1. INTRODUCTION

Wenden (1996: 236) again draws on Flavell (1979, 1981) to describe strategic knowledge as "general knowledge about the nature of strategies, their utility and specific knowledge about when and how to deploy individual ones". Much has been written about the nature of strategies themselves: in broad terms, early studies into the good language learner (Naiman et al., 1978) considered general approaches to strategy use; more specifically, attempts to describe in detail the strategies, both cognitive and metacognitive, which either individually or in combination influence aspects of language learning, have taken the form of various typologies (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990).

This section mainly describes the ways in which the pupils themselves construe language learning strategies, restricting itself to those strategies which emerge as part of the pupils' knowledge or beliefs about language learning. In other words, the intention was not to present pupils with lists of strategies for discussion, but rather to introduce conversations about various real and hypothetical learning situations in order to elicit pupils' responses. It is necessarily a limited attempt to find out what the pupils know about the strategies they employ or could employ, and, in common with other sections of this thesis, is not claiming that this knowledge is put into practice effectively. Nor is it claiming that the data is exhaustive, as this would require a much greater focus on strategy use via think-aloud protocols or learning diaries. The aim is to gain a limited sense of the pupils' breadth of accessible knowledge and their beliefs with regard to learning strategies, in order to provide an

insight into the extent to which this may contribute to the pupils' sense of control over their learning. To a certain extent, it also serves the purpose of triangulation, as the data which emerges reflects the broader story told by each group.

Data for this section is drawn mainly, but not exclusively, from FGC5, which included an activity about ways in which pupils can and do practise language, both in class or elsewhere, as well as a projective activity in which pupils are asked to advise other learners with specific issues, and some key questions on various aspects of strategy use. These questions were selected on the basis of situations and tasks which would be meaningful to the pupils, as identified in earlier conversations. As such, it covers only a very selected number of possible aspects of strategy use (vocabulary learning, understanding written and spoken language, dealing with unknown language met in reading passages, techniques for compensating for language gaps when trying to communicate orally, learning from mistakes, and managing 'panic').

Unlike earlier sections of this thesis, data has been reduced to a number of categories using grounded theory techniques, in order to form a typology of strategies as construed by the pupils within the limitations of this research. This will first be described in general terms before discussing the findings for each of the four groups.

At the end of the section there will be an additional analysis of a different kind of strategic knowledge, namely that which is related to the broader concepts of

voice, influence and resistance. In other words, what beliefs the pupils hold about the ways in which their voices should be heard in the classroom and school, and what strategies they employ to make them heard. This will lead to a brief evaluation of the role of the focus group conversations in facilitating the expression of voices.

8.2. A TYPOLOGY OF PUPILS' STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE

Use of a constant comparison method of qualitative analysis, adapted from Glaser and Strauss (1967), produced five categories of strategic knowledge related to language learning overall, though not every group of pupils offered insights into each category (see Table 8.1). The five categories are related to self-regulatory processes in terms of their potential for enabling pupils to understand, practise, memorise, and produce language and to take responsibility for their own success:

a) comprehension strategies: used to make sense of new language met whilst reading or listening to the language;

b) practising strategies: ways in which pupils claim that they practise or could practise language inside or outside the classroom;

c) memorising strategies: initially called 'learning strategies' in the early stages of my analysis, as they describe the ways in which pupils suggest they learn (usually meaning revise or commit to memory) language which has been met and practised;

d) production strategies: used to cope with gaps in knowledge when pupils are speaking or writing, a form of compensatory strategy though focused on productive use of language;

e) success strategies: a catch-all category of broad strategies, including affective and self-management strategies, which includes ways in which pupils describe how they achieve, or may achieve, success in language learning.

It is important to note that the pupils claim not to have taken part in any systematic discussion of strategies in their lessons, so, apart from some common strategies for comprehension which are to a certain extent introduced as a way of preparing pupils for examinations, these represent the pupils' own common-sense constructions of how to learn. They are also drawn from pupils' knowledge, and not accessed immediately retrospectively. For these reasons, the data can only be interpreted in a limited way. Nevertheless, it will be seen that there are interesting differences between the four groups which will be briefly highlighted in the next section.

Generally speaking, comprehension strategies have been sorted into those used to understand the written word and those used to understand the spoken word. Given the pupils' claims to do few listening activities, all groups have identified more reading than listening strategies. Practising strategies have been sorted into those which at least one pupil claims to employ already, and those which are suggested as possible strategies, but not employed. Memorising strategies have been roughly sorted along a continuum of passive to active strategies, with the latter ones in some groups offering insights into the ways in which pupils try to fix the language into their heads. Production strategies, listed in random order, focus on what pupils do if they wish to communicate

something which requires unknown language. Finally, the success strategies are largely very general, revealing a range from attitude-related to action-related strategies which are related to ways in which the pupils take responsibility for their success.

Table 8.1 Overview of strategic knowledge

	Comprehension strategies	Practising strategies	Memorising strategies	Production strategies	Success strategies
A1	**Reading** Look for words similar to English Work out the meaning from what is known already Use questions to guide reading Ignore words not understood Guess Ask Use dictionary **Listening** Listen to TV and try to pick up, using picture	**Used by at least one** Look through old books Do tasks Listen to tape Speak to each other Write down and say Write in French and translate Listen to teacher **Not used** Borrow library books Read French book/magazine Watch German TV Play German game	Pick words up in class rather than learning vocabulary Revise Just look through book Read exercise books aloud Keep going over same reading Write out to get right spelling Use page layout Think of pictures		Try best Take time Take care Concentrate Listen to teacher Do homework Ask for help
A2	**Reading** Use questions to understand text Guess Ask teacher/someone else Get a dictionary Just sit there	**Used by at least one** Revise Work Speak Write **Not used** Books Television Homework	Go through books Go on vacation (study trip) Watch TV and write notes		Listen to teacher (if can understand) Copy homework

	Comprehension strategies	Practising strategies	Memorising strategies	Production strategies	Success strategies
B1	**Reading** Read passage then look at questions so that something 'triggers' Skim through text, look at questions, then go back in detail Look at the words in the question then pick them out from the text Work it out from the rest of the sentence Work it out from what's happened Ask Use a dictionary **Listening** Listen and work it out from the words you know When you ask a question you have an idea of what they are replying Pick up the gist Use non-verbal clues, e.g. laughter	**Used by at least one** Do tasks from earlier years Read simple books or newspaper Look at German textbooks Read your old books Ask others to test you Be around people talking French Watch German cartoons Use computer, e.g. listen and repeat to French programmes Record and listen to self Talk French often Write out a passage and test self for pronunciation **Not used** Do work experience in Bochum Look at German internet sites Listen to foreign tape Watch German Sky channels Listen to French radio Record self speaking and get it checked	Listen in class Read out loud Write down a few times to ensure you learn it properly Make a glossary Ask parents to help/test you Set targets Learn from mistakes Revise and re-revise Read over and over in head Go over it lots of times in your head If you forget a word, try to remember before looking up Jot notes Write down what you're finding difficult to remember	**If you don't know a word...** Ask teacher/friends Look in dictionary Work it out for yourself Act it out like when in Spain Point Say the word in English with an accent	Try very hard Panic Avoid panic (guess if necessary) Listen to teacher Don't give up Ask someone if you can't manage alone Be organised Understand why you're doing a task Set targets

	Comprehension strategies	Practising strategies	Memorising strategies	Production strategies	Success strategies
B2	**Reading** Work it out Read through text and use questions to help Work out from the rest of the sentence Use the question to find the word in the text Break into sections and get each section into your head then try to answer referring back to text Look for keywords like football (don't need sentences) Use your own head instead of asking or looking up Ask the teacher Use dictionary **Listening** Keep listening and it will get easier in time When listening, skip the questions you can't do and focus on what you can do	**Used by at least one** Listen to two people having a conversation Practise with a French person or your teacher Shopping in French shops **Not used** Live with a German family Spend a few days in France Make French friends Work with a French person Read a book in class then have 20 minutes of questions Read French newspapers, magazines, books Watch French videos and ask questions Bring a French person in to speak Listen to radio Speak to French people on phone Make a languages tape Just talk in French for five minutes every lesson Write to French people Write a play script and read out	Know what is expected in GCSE Learn from mistakes (teacher should list them all) Remember the words Think of the picture in your head Take notice of words when reading them Remember them in the order in which they are presented Switch it from English to German in your head then in dictionary Read notes in book, make a sentence and note it down Need to use a word in a sentence rather than just in a column where it does not mean anything	**If you don't know a word...** Say it how it sounds Say a bit of it Trial and error Make sentences up around word you don't know	Listen Copy words correctly Look up or ask Concentrate Keep calm Don't do difficult tasks for homework as you'll feel bad Set targets

8.3. STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE

8.3.1. Strategic knowledge: the Grafters

These pupils again reveal a readiness to take some control of their learning. They have a range of strategies, particularly for reading comprehension, though their lack of listening and speaking experience is revealed in their sparse knowledge of these strategies. Their reading comprehension strategies reveal an awareness of specific self-regulatory processes, though their memorising strategies are vague and naïve, showing mainly a reliance on reading and copying out (apart from the use of pictures, which features often in conversations with this group), with little sense of monitoring and evaluating strategies which would enable them to learn more effectively. Similarly, their practising and success strategies reveal an understanding that they need to play an active role in their learning, but they are not specifically aimed at fixing the language into their memories, possibly leading to their sense of frustration at their own inability to concentrate or to revise effectively.

8.3.2. Strategic knowledge: the Angry Victims

This group's strategic knowledge is very sparse, and includes a number of general ideas such as 'work', 'speak' and 'write'. Apart from Penny's explanation of how she uses questions to help her with reading comprehension, the comprehension strategies mainly reveal a passive approach (just sitting, guessing without effort, copying). Even when dictionaries are mentioned, it is claimed that they are not used either because they cannot use them or because the teacher does not tell them to use them. When they suggest that a successful learner listens to the teacher, they claim not to do so because they do not

understand her. Their suggested ways of memorising language show little insight into how to approach this task, though they do suggest some awareness of the need to do something. Overall, the strategic knowledge reflects once again an absence of control over learning, both in terms of their beliefs about where control (and responsibility) should be located and in relation to their self-regulatory strategies.

8.3.3. Strategic knowledge: the Sophisticates

These pupils introduce the largest quantity of strategies of any group into the conversations, and this emerges in the analysis despite the loss of some of the data from FGC5 because of recording problems. Furthermore, their strategies are varied and reveal a sense of responsibility for learning, a belief that they can, or should be able to, control learning outcomes to a large extent, and an awareness of some self-regulatory strategies which will enable them to understand, practise, memorise and produce language. They discuss and debate comprehension strategies maturely, including a number of ways of 'working out' for themselves what something means. They suggest a number of strategies for practising the language, including some new ideas which they have not thought of before and which the conversations have enabled them to construct. In both their practising and their memorising strategies, they reveal a number which enable them to monitor and evaluate their learning (peer and parental testing, self-testing, repetition and monitoring of pronunciation, making an effort to remember rather than immediately asking or looking up a word, identifying and noting down language which is difficult to remember). This is a particular feature of this group which does not feature with any other

group. In addition, there is evidence of further self-management strategies related to planning work, e.g. making a glossary, target setting. There is also a strong sense of determination to remember language by going through work repeatedly until known, and this determination is also reflected in their success strategies. This group also suggests some interesting production strategies which reveal an engagement with language as communication and an ability to relate to the communicative context.

8.3.4. Strategic knowledge: the Frustrated

Once again, this data initially appeared to be contradictory. The pupils produced almost as many ideas as the Sophisticates, despite poor attendance in FGC5. This is probably unsurprising given their presence in the higher achieving class. Closer examination of the strategies, however, showed some qualitative differences. The belief that learners should be actively involved in, responsible for, and in control of their learning is reflected in the active nature of the strategies, and comprehension strategies are a particular strength in reading (though listening strategies suggest less proactivity and a lack of focus on how to cope with the unknown). This possibly reflects the importance they place on managing on their own resources, and using their own heads. They have many ideas for practising the language, but claim not to use many of these. They also suggest useful production strategies. The major difference between this group and the Sophisticates, however, arises in the quality of practising and memorising strategies. Despite the importance which this group places on memorising language, they show little insight into strategies to ensure that this happens. They recognise the importance of taking notice of

language, of switching on the brain, and also of learning words in context, but, apart from using visual support and reference to the use of translation, they reveal little to suggest that they have active strategies to help them remember language. They refer to memorising in a particular order, but this is more of a negative comment as it is referred to in the context of memorising a sequence as presented by the teacher rather than memorising the language for itself. Not surprisingly given this group's demand for authenticity and for normal conversations, more of their strategies seem to rely on a form of immersion, in which passive contact with the language will facilitate learning (repeated listening will make comprehension easier, being with foreign people etc), strategies which also appear in the Sophisticates' conversations but which they supplement with specific active strategies. Where their strategies really differ from the Sophisticates, however, is in the absence of self-monitoring and self-evaluating strategies; there is no sense of testing themselves in order to know whether the language has been internalised or not. Even when a reference is made to learning from mistakes, it is dependent on the teacher to correct the mistakes rather than on finding ways of identifying them themselves, not because they believe that it is not their role, but because they sense their own lack of strategic knowledge in this aspect of learning. The group's frustration is fed, then, by their lack of strategies to enable them to do that which they value most highly.

8.3.5. Reflections

Not surprisingly, there appears to be a strong relationship between person knowledge and strategic knowledge. Where pupils have a strong belief in their

own agency as learners, the strategic knowledge reflects this, either through a belief in the active nature of strategies or through evidence that such strategies may be used. If the pupils not only believe that they should exert control and take responsibility for their learning, but also reveal knowledge about how to do this through self-regulatory strategies (the Sophisticates), they appear to be more motivated than where there is a mismatch between beliefs and knowledge (the Frustrated). This is particularly apparent with those self-regulatory strategies which enable language to be memorised.

With the Grafters, there is also a mismatch, though they remain more motivated than the Frustrated to a certain extent. A possible explanation for this lies in the narrower gap between their beliefs and knowledge related to general task knowledge. The different, possibly lower, expectations of what language learning is about are more within reach of the Grafters, who are therefore more easily, though not entirely, satisfied by the outcomes which their strategies enable them to attain.

As may have been expected, there is no evidence from the Angry Victims that strategies used by them can make a difference, and this is matched by a near absence of strategic knowledge. However, there is also evidence even with this group that strategic knowledge is enhanced where it is taught. This is also the case with the Grafters and the Frustrated where knowledge of comprehension strategies is revealed, possibly as a result of the link between these and examination technique. Where there is no evidence of explicit teaching, such as

more varied memorising strategies, these remain more rudimentary or absent, presumably depending on other individual differences between pupils.

8.4. VOICE AND INFLUENCE: RESISTANCE STRATEGIES

The third type of voice referred to in chapter 4 was that which is related to concepts of agency and resistance and which is essentially a political voice. This section will briefly consider the pupils' beliefs and knowledge about the role their voices should be allowed to play in school, both specifically in their language lessons and more generally, and the strategies which are at their disposal to make themselves heard. This will enable this dimension to be added to the overall picture of language learning constructions in the final discussion.

The data draws largely from FGC6, though it is informed by analysis of other aspects of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs.

8.4.1. Voice and the Grafters

With the Grafters, there is initially little sense of a desire to express their voice. Their belief in the importance of their own role in controlling learning leads them to attribute learning outcomes mainly to themselves, leading to a belief that any learning problems are mostly related to their own lack of self-control, which is a source of dissatisfaction as they are not sure how they can improve this.

Nevertheless, there is also some external attribution, for example in their perception that extrinsic motivational measures (gold slips, praise) are an

external attempt to control them. They also suggest that the teacher should make the work more engaging to enable them to concentrate better:

This externally directed dissatisfaction is not, however, strong enough to encourage openly resistant behaviour in the classroom. Instead, pupils admit to the following passive resistance strategies:

> *T: [...] What do you do if you don't like the lesson?*
>
> Helen: Don't listen. Don't listen. Just start talking to your friends.
>
> [..]
>
> Peter: Draw.
>
> Louis: Sit and pretend that I'm asleep.
>
> [...]
>
> Nadia: Just sit there not listening.

They recognise, however, that this does not change anything other than "it makes it go quicker" (Peter).

What eventually emerges in the conversation, however, is that the teacher should consult the pupils by asking them to write down what they enjoy doing. It must be stressed that this did not emerge easily, implying that it may not be felt very strongly and explicitly, or may be overshadowed by their own strongly internal attributions. However, it may be an idea which requires a sense of security before it is expressed, as it is not really 'allowed'. They are nevertheless very real beliefs, hinted at in earlier conversations and repeated at various points in the final one:

T: [...] Think of a good teacher that you've got. [...]

Helen: They listen to you.

T: Pardon?

H: They listen to you.

T: Right they listen to you. In what way? [...].

Helen: Well if they say something and you've got like your own opinion, sometimes they're not even that bothered about listening to you. But if they do, then they're prepared to listen to other views and that.

At the end of the final conversation, the pupils say that the conversations have been useful and agree that it would be useful to discuss similar issues in lessons:

Helen: We should do it more at the beginning. [...]

Carol: They'd get through to the learners more cos they'd know what we want. Instead of...doing what they want.

[...]

Peter: We should be able to interview the teachers so they can see our opinions.

Because they locate control mainly in themselves, these pupils do not feel confident or competent enough to challenge any aspects which may hinder their learning:

Helen: No, because you don't know and you just like think it's their lesson and they've already planned it and we don't know what.... And then you might think, Oh well I think we should have done this, or this this way and that that way and then you don't really want to say anything to t'teacher. Like nobody's ever said anything like that to t'teachers before, so you don't know how they are going to react; they could react in a bad way or a good way. They could say, good idea, how would you like the lesson to be planned then, on the other hand they could say, this is my lesson and you don't tell me how to teach it.

This does, however, represent a lost potential for gaining insights from the pupils' voices, which potentially could enhance their learning and sustain their motivation.

8.4.2. Voice and the Angry Victims

The Angry Victims' strongly external attribution beliefs mean not only that they do not know how to control their learning, but also do not believe that they should. Carol's suggestion in FGC6 that "if they'd solid worked us, I think we'd learn a lot more", and that this should be done through punishment and reward, is another example of this belief which is expressed so powerfully throughout the conversations. Combined with their sense of disconnection from any school processes, this leads to a powerful expression of resistance which takes the form of openly confrontational behaviour. Many examples of this have been described throughout this analysis, from the refusal to do "their" homework in "our" time, to more openly disruptive classroom behaviour. When asked explicitly what they do if they do not like the lesson, the following strategies emerge:

> Candice: You just sit there and ignore them.
>
> [...]
>
> Penny: Just don't listen to them.
>
> Candice: I go to sleep, me.
>
> Penny: I just start laughing, me, at them. I just laugh. [...]
>
> [...]
>
> Candice: But women teachers you don't bother really; you just give 'em all t'lip and that.

Penny: But with men you just pay more attention because they're...I don't know. It's bad. But Miss, I count her as a man myself.

[...]

Candice: Do you know, before you came in, she told me to get my jacket off and I still didn't have it off by t'time you came in. And as soon as I was in that classroom and sat down, she said 'can you take your jacket off, Candice?' I just sat there and she didn't say it again. Then she said it just before you walked in and I just thought 'what??'

[...]

Candice: When I were in Miss J's class I used to say I were poorly all the time.

Luke: She used to cough up and all snot came up and made her sick.

Candice: I swear to God. I used to do no lesson at all. If you look back at my book I did no work at all. Just scrappy little bits of writing every so often. I used to stick t'pages together so it looked like I'd done more work.

[...]

Penny: Walk out.

Candice: Not go.

[...]

Candice: Stick t'knot on it. Hit 'im.

Penny: You can't hit him!

Candice: I would!

Penny: You wouldn't Candice!

Candice: If you could shout at them it would get all your anger out...[...]

Apart from the bravado displayed by Candice and challenged by Penny, there is a sense in these points that they are really planned strategies rather than spontaneous behaviour. The gender of the teacher is a factor which influences

the strategies selected, teacher response is tested through protection of personal space in the form of keeping a coat on, ignoring the teacher is a much more deliberate form of strategy than passively not listening or daydreaming as expressed by the Grafters, and there is even a hint of pride in Candice's strategies of feigning sickness and sticking pages together. They are capable of saying why they are disaffected and why they are choosing to behave in a certain way. These are strategies of active resistance, planned as part of the battle and as a way of gaining some control over a context which is unacceptable to them.

Of course, these strategies do not really help the situation as far as learning is concerned. However, the pupils cannot think of any alternative ways of making their voices heard. A question regarding the School Council leads to the following comment:

> Penny: They don't do nowt. They just organise discos and that, don't they? You can't go to the Council and say, I want that teacher to change.

Therefore active resistance will be continued, with negative outcomes. It is interesting that this is the only group to comment that in Y10 the teachers treat the pupils worse than ever, as all other groups make favourable comments about being treated in a more adult fashion.

8.4.3. Voice and the Sophisticates

These pupils have strong beliefs in the need to make their voices heard. One manifestation of this is the desire to have their classroom responses listened to carefully:

> Mark: [...] Like sometimes some teachers just want one particular answer; you might say something's that's right and they just chuck it, like they don't pay much attention to you, they just tell you it's wrong. Whereas other teachers what understand you more would say, yea that's right and go into it with you so you understand it a bit more.

For Jodie it is a matter of being taken seriously:

> Jodie: I think a good teacher is somebody who doesn't look down at you, who treats you like you're an adult, not just a little kid.

Being treated in a more adult way includes being able to take responsibility for learning (or not) in the classroom, though the pupils understand that this is not a completely free choice and that the teacher may need to introduce sanctions for those who take advantage:

> Mark: Then it's up to them to like sort you out at the end of the lesson, but throughout the lesson it's up to you if you're going to do it or not. Mostly, if teachers say that to you, then you talk and that but you end up doing it, and you enjoy the lesson more, rather than thinking, oh I hate this lesson and I don't want to go, stuff like that.

Having a voice also means that the teacher needs to create an environment where pupils "feel safe enough to put your hand up to ask" (Mark).

If dissatisfied, these pupils can resort to some potentially negative forms of active resistance, but this is carefully planned so as not to cause themselves too many problems with the teachers:

> Mark: Once you know your teacher, you know what annoys them straight away.
>
> Jodie: You know how far to go.
>
> Mark: Before they get too mad and you get in trouble.

Having their voices listened to by the teachers is, however, not straightforward, though these pupils can sometimes find ways of being heard:

> Mark: You could try telling your teacher if you just find it boring. You could tell them that you're not finding it very interesting and you're not the only one, and perhaps the teacher could change the way they do the lesson and things to try and make it more interesting [...]
>
> Jimmy: Some of the teachers would say stop complaining and sit down.
>
> *T: Do you do that?*
>
> Jimmy: Yea, but you'd have to not do it in the middle of the class, not just shout it out because the teachers will just tell you to be quiet, even if you just wanted to do better. But I suppose they'd understand more if you went after the lesson and said it's not just you, [...] Or you could tell a tutor.
>
> *T: Have you ever done that?*
>
> Mark: Once last year in science. We were doing a topic and all we did every lesson was get a book out and write out of the book. [...] I asked everyone else if it were any good and a few of us went to us tutor and said that we weren't doing anything in the lesson because she'd complained about us for not doing anything, so we told the tutor why. And the tutor went back and explained what the problem was and she changed it a bit.
>
> *T: So she didn't sort of say, I'm the teacher and I know how to do it best?*
>
> Mark: Yea, she ended up not really liking us because we didn't do anything. So we thought it would be better if it came from us tutor rather than us saying it to her, as she wouldn't take it in.

This is an example of actively positive resistance, where the pupils acted in a considered way in order to gain positive outcomes. It shows great sensitivity and empathy, as well as an awareness of strategic ways of influencing learning. It leads Jimmy on to thinking about the potential role of the School Council, revealing a sensible awareness of the bigger financial picture:

> Jimmy: [...] But it might be able to do a bit more stuff if it involved like changing t'teachers, because all we ever do in the

> School Council is talk about discos. We've asked for loads of things, like lockers, bike racks, Mars bars, stuff being sold at dinner, vending machines, but we never get any of it because it's all too expensive. But if you asked if anyone could get together to talk to the teachers to try and get their act a bit better, it might actually do summat.

However, there is a sense that it is still not the norm for pupils' voices to be expressed with regard to their learning. If the pupils are able to find strategies for making themselves heard, then it may be successful, but it is not part of the school structures. Consequently, despite a positive view of the ways in which the focused group conversations had allowed them to express their voices, the pupils' final comments suggested scepticism about how acceptable this would be in lessons:

> Mark: It wouldn't work with a teacher. Cos you wouldn't want to say anything against your own teacher.
>
> Jodie: It wouldn't work because you wouldn't dare say anything against them. If it was an outsider that came in, like you, we could say ought to you. [...]

8.4.4. Voice and the Frustrated

Although the Frustrated believe that they, as learners, should be in control of and take responsibility for their learning, they are not positive about their own potential to take this control due to their own perceived shortcomings. As with the Grafters, then, they express little dissatisfaction externally. If they do not like a lesson, they passively sit in the classroom, even though they may not be listening or doing the work, but chatting or "doing something else, like writing in your books or summat" (Lorna). They appear to know very little about the role of the School Council, unlike other groups. Reasons for this lack of agency

are possibly related to their internal attribution, but also to their belief that teachers will not be happy listening to their opinions about *their* lessons:

> Mick: If the teachers know they'd probably get t'pog on wi' you and start treating you totally different.
>
> Lorna: Yea, they'd probably treat you nasty in class and that.
> [...]
>
> Mick: [...] If you complain about their teaching scheme, they'll just like ignore you, not treat you proper.

We have seen, however, that there is a gap between this group's task knowledge and beliefs, and that they do have strong ideas particularly about the content of the languages curriculum. Like with the Grafters, the group eventually feels able to express some of its frustration as an external attribution, though they also reveal that they have had negative experiences of attempting to make their voices heard in the past:

> Andy: (shakes head) No, they'd shout or take it out on me.
>
> *T: Really! If you made a suggestion like that?*
>
> Mick: Oh aye yeah.
>
> Andy: I said why do we always have t'copy off t'board and she...
>
> Mick: She had a right go at him.
>
> *T: Why, what did she say?*
>
> Mick: She just said...
>
> Andy: ...you're questioning her teaching ability.
>
> Mick: ...and now we've been doing a lot more writing, copying. (10B2FGC5)

The final words of this group in FGC6 clearly reveal the group's desire to be heard:

T: Do you think there should be more research like this, asking young people what their views are?

Mick: Yea. They usually ask adults what they think but they should ask children, people like us.

Lorna: Like, the teachers are always being asked so we should too.

Mick: Because we've got things to say about the school as much as they have.

8.4.5. Reflections

This analysis of resistance strategies and pupils' desire to be heard links back to the theoretical explorations in chapter 1. Within a context of power relationships as represented in pupil-teacher relationships in an urban school, manifestations of pupils' agency, through resistance, appear in various forms:

- passive resistance, through unplanned non-participation, chatter, loss of concentration
- active resistance, through planned non-participation, disruption, confrontation
- positive resistance, through planned negotiation, expression of voices, bringing about an improvement in learning conditions
- negative resistance, through behaviours which do not bring about improvement in learning conditions, or which exacerbate failure

In addition, there appears to be some connection with person knowledge and beliefs particularly with regard to locus of control over learning. Those who believe that changes in learning can best come about through external contextual change (even if they believe in their own active role in learning)

appear to display active resistance strategies in an attempt to change the conditions for learning, whereas those who believe that internal changes are most needed display passive resistance strategies.

As far as the four groups are concerned, the following summary is thus possible:

The Grafters: passive, negative forms of resistance; unprincipled, unplanned strategies; no improvement in learning conditions (potential increasing disillusionment)

The Angry Victims: active, negative resistance; principled, planned strategies; deterioration in learning conditions (potential downward spiral)

The Sophisticates: active, positive resistance; principled, planned strategies; improvement in learning conditions (provided their voices are listened to, otherwise, potential disillusionment)

The Frustrated: passive, negative resistance; unprincipled, unplanned strategies; no improvement in learning conditions (potential increase in frustration linked to the group's high expectations)

This summary suggests external changes would benefit all groups. The motivated groups could potentially lose motivation in the long term unless they are encouraged to voice their opinions on the ways in which their language learning (or indeed any learning) is organised in the school. The Grafters could become increasingly disillusioned by their own perceived difficulties in learning in the ways they believe they should be learning, and increasingly feel resentful of the teachers who do not stimulate them, which could lead to an

increased attribution of failure to unchangeable external features. Their forms of resistance are similar to those displayed by the Frustrated, a demotivated group, but the Grafters may be sustained in their motivation by generally lower expectations of the learning task. Without structured opportunities to reflect on their learning environment and to express their voices, however, they may eventually feel more powerless to improve their learning, and become increasingly disaffected. The Sophisticates gain satisfaction in their own internal control of learning, but desire to express their voices in order to optimise their learning opportunities. If these voices are not 'allowed' or listened to, the pupils could, like the Grafters, begin to lose their sense of control over learning and attribute all weaknesses to unchangeable external features.

For the demotivated groups, there is potential for improvement if there are structured opportunities for their voices to make a positive difference. Otherwise, language learning for the Angry Victims will continue to be a battleground, and pupils may eventually drift out of learning altogether (as had already started in Y10). It may be too late to reverse the situation for these pupils, but opportunities to channel such resistance in positive ways, through voices which are listened to and taken seriously, may possibly avoid similar breakdowns in communication amongst other pupils if introduced earlier. The Frustrated may also have benefited from structured opportunities to be heard, as it may have allowed their sense of achievement, and their motivation, to be sustained.

In summary, all of these groups desire to have their voices heard. Some do something about it, others don't. Some do something positive, others do something negative, or do nothing much at all. The tentative suggestion from this analysis is that motivation for all could deteriorate if their voices are not heard, and this appears to support the reconceptualisation of disaffection as a 'search for a voice'.

8.5. COMMENTS ON THE FOCUSED GROUP CONVERSATIONS

As I described in my section on access, I needed to consider how I would convince the pupils that it was worthwhile attending these meetings in order to *sustain* their involvement. In fact, on only one occasion did a pupil (Louis) prefer to stay in the classroom, possibly because he had changed groups and felt less at ease returning to his old group. The two boys who teased me by hiding under the desk when I went to the classroom did this to make me think that they did not wish to come with me, but this was more an indication of the positive relationship they had developed with me, expressed in humour.

In the final meetings (FCG6), pupils were overwhelmingly positive about the conversations. The Grafters agreed with Helen that they had been an opportunity to discuss new and interesting issues:

> Helen: I thought they were good because we spoke about things that we've never spoke about before. (10A1FGC6)

When encouraged to be critical, Peter and Nadia simply said that "they were interesting". There was of course little to suggest that the conversations themselves had impacted on their own learning, which was not the intention anyway, though Helen did suggest that they may have had some impact:

> Helen: Yea. I've started to listen a bit more and do things, you know like when we discussed about things you could do to improve. (10A1FGC6)

The Angry Victims were also positive. Candice declared them "good" and an opportunity to "speak your mind", Luke said they were "better than us French lessons" (a backhanded compliment!), and Penny found them "useful". There was support from all for such conversations to continue ("I'd do 'em again", said Candice). Though they all agreed that the conversations had had no impact on their own learning, they all uttered a loud 'yeah!!' when asked if they should talk about these things with their teachers. The desire to be heard was best expressed by Penny, always the most articulate of the group:

> Penny: All t'things we've said, I think we should record it and let t'teachers listen to it. But not shout at us for what we've said though. I think they should. But they're not going to listen anyway. (10A2FGC6)

The Sophisticates all said they enjoyed the conversations. Jimmy characteristically said that the meetings were "a lot better than languages", whilst Mick, again characteristically, said they were "easygoing, very, very easy. You don't feel as stupid..." Jodie reinforced this, suggesting that "you don't care about the same things because you know everybody is in the same situation as you". Despite their misgivings about carrying out similar activities with their teachers, as described earlier, all felt that there should be more research of this kind about languages, with Mick adding:

> Mick: It gets back to t'teachers. It gets back to every teacher, not just one. So they know how you feel. (10B1FGC6)

The Frustrated claimed that they had increasingly enjoyed the conversations as they got to know me better, and that the final one was the best because they

were "talking more", "discussing more", "arguing more". Though they had not really changed as a result of the conversations, because "you really need to want to learn languages but if you don't want to then you won't change" (Mick, 10B2FGC6), they felt very strongly that pupils' views should be included in research.

From my own point of view, I am pleased with the richness of data which resulted from these conversations. Pupils contributed many fascinating ideas, and enabled me to build up a detailed picture of language learning from their perspectives. In addition, the opportunity to meet the pupils over an extended period brought benefits beyond the intended ones of accessing a range of constructions and voices and validating data. It also enabled me to notice changes in the pupils and their perceptions of learning, to facilitate some remarkable conversations (particularly in the last conversation where any last barriers came down), and to gain insights into the ways in which constructions are constructed according to what is allowed in a particular context.

As far as my own role in the research is concerned, I believe that I managed to maintain the role which I had envisaged, through the strategies I had planned. A remarkable relationship was built up with some of these pupils, and I value enormously the trust they placed in me. However, old habits die hard, and there were tensions occasionally in maintaining my planned role, particularly with the Angry Victims. However, I was not the only one to find it hard to maintain such a new kind of adult-pupil relationship. Having finally been convinced that

I had dismantled some power barriers, I realized that these were far too sturdy to be removed over six meetings when I heard Peter's final words to me:

> "Are t'teachers gonna see t'video, SIR?" (10A2FGC6)

8.6. SUMMARY OF ALL DATA

Table 8.2 summarises the findings of the 24 focused group conversations. These include an overview of significant aspects of motivation and autonomy as suggested by this research, namely:

- Congruence or incongruence of person beliefs and person knowledge, i.e. whether or not there is a match between the construction of the learner in general and the construction of self as learner
- Internal or external locus of control beliefs, i.e. whether person beliefs include the learner as having control over and responsibility for learning or not
- Internal or external attribution of constraints on learning, i.e. whether these are mainly attributed to the learner or to external factors, and whether they are stable or unstable, i.e. where the constraints can be changed or not
- Self-regulation, i.e. internal learning strategies, related to autonomy
- Self-management, i.e. relating to ways of planning, monitoring and evaluating the overall learning process, related to independence
- Motivation orientation, i.e. intrinsic, extrinsic, instrumental, integrative
- Life-school connectedness or disconnectedness, i.e. ways in which school and education relate to their lives or not

- Congruence or incongruence of task knowledge and task beliefs, i.e. whether or not there is a match between what the learner expects of the nature and purpose of language learning, and how it is manifested in school
- Task knowledge (specific), i.e. understanding of the nature and purpose of learning tasks
- Preferred mode of learning (whole-class, group or individual)
- Type of resistance, i.e. active or passive, positive or negative

Table 8.2 also contains a brief summary which uses the construct of 'voice' to mean internal processes, i.e. metacognitive constructions, and external processes, i.e. resistance, as well as a summary of potential future developments.

Table 8.2: Summary of all data

AI: The Grafters	**B1: The Sophisticates**
• Person Knowledge-Person Beliefs incongruent • Internal locus of control beliefs • Strong internal attribution of constraints on learning (stable) (later some external and stable) • Naïve self-regulation • Poor self-management • Motivated instrumentally • Life-school connectedness • Task Knowledge-Task Beliefs congruent (modest expectations) • Rudimentary (specific) task knowledge • Independent learning as opportunity for self-control • Passive, negative resistance **Summary: no effective internal or external voice (but temporarily satisfied because expectations are modest)** *Eventual disillusionment displayed passively?*	• Person Knowledge-Person Beliefs congruent • Internal locus of control beliefs • External attribution of constraints on learning (unstable), (with some internal and unstable) • Strong self-regulation • Strong self-management • Motivated intrinsically, integratively and instrumentally • Life-school connectedness • Task Knowledge-Task Beliefs incongruent (high expectations) • Strong (specific) task knowledge • Independent/group learning as opportunity to control learning through choice • Active, positive resistance **Summary: strong internal and external voice (but high expectations means they have to be listened to)** *Motivation maintained provided voices are heard? Otherwise confrontation?*
A2: The Angry Victims	**B2: The Frustrated**
• Person Knowledge-Person Beliefs congruent • External locus of control beliefs • Strong external attribution of constraints on learning (stable) (with some internal and stable) • Little self-regulation • Poor self-management • Disaffected (with integrative tendency) • Life-school disconnectedness • Task Knowledge-Task Beliefs incongruent (unrealistic expectations) • Poor (specific) task knowledge • Group learning as opportunity to control learning context • Active, negative resistance **Summary: no internal voice and no external voice other than through confrontation** *Downward spiral?*	• Person Knowledge-Person Beliefs incongruent • Internal locus of control beliefs • Strong internal attribution of constraints on learning (stable) (with some external and stable) • Little self-regulation • Good self-management • Demotivated (with limited instrumental and strong integrative tendency) • Home-school somewhat disconnected • Task Knowledge-Task Beliefs incongruent (unrealistic expectations) • Little (specific) task knowledge • Independent learning as opportunity to meet individual needs and control learning • Passive, negative resistance **Summary: no effective internal voice and no external voice** *Eventual disaffection?*

Firstly, I will briefly summarise each of the groups, then I will attempt to synthesise the findings in order to provide some tentative relationships between autonomy and motivation.

The summaries are written in the form of thumbnail sketches. It is important to note that, as summaries, the focus is on the group, and that claims can only be tentative on the basis of this particular piece of research.

8.6.1. The Grafters

These pupils have strong beliefs that the learner should have control over learning, but, because they attribute failure to maintain this control on internal failings, such as poor concentration, they recognise that they could do better, meaning that there is incongruence between their person beliefs and their knowledge of themselves as learners. Unfortunately, they believe these constraints on learning to be stable and unchangeable, as they do not know how to control themselves better. The internal constraints also include little evidence of self-management skills, and naïve levels of self-regulation, particularly in areas of strategic knowledge which would enable them to practise and remember the language more effectively (though they been taught sufficient comprehension strategies to be able to cope with this aspect to a certain extent).

They see connections between their education generally and their lives outside the school. In terms of language learning, they are largely instrumentally motivated. However, they do not really enjoy learning languages for their own

sake, nor do they see any prospect of extended contacts with foreign speakers. They respond to extrinsic motivation to a certain extent, though there is some realisation that it is not genuinely meant.

Because they have fairly modest beliefs about language learning as a task, the way in which they see it manifested in the school is congruent with their expectations, though they would appreciate more opportunities for independent learning as they see this as an opportunity for them to concentrate on their learning more easily than when they have to listen to the teacher. However, they display only a rudimentary knowledge of specific tasks which could limit the effectiveness of the choices which are fundamental to independent learning.

These pupils are mainly satisfied with the school language learning context, but recognise to a certain extent that it could be more engaging, especially in Y10. Again, however, they perceive this as stable or unchangeable as they have no influence over their teachers. However, they respond to this weakness passively, for example through loss of concentration, rather than through any strategic action, which only exacerbates their difficulties with learning.

8.6.2. The Angry Victims

The Angry Victims have strong beliefs that the learner has no control over learning, that it is something which is done to them. Because of this, they attribute any failure to learn to others, mainly their teacher, and believe themselves powerless to influence this, thus rendering these constraints unchangeable or stable. This suggests that their person knowledge and their

beliefs about the learner's role are congruent, meaning that their experiences in school are perceived as disempowering and mystifying as a result of poor teaching. There is some evidence of internal attribution of failure, but again this is attributed to stable causes, such as lack of confidence or ability. In fact, they also reveal little evidence of any knowledge about self-regulation or self-management which means that their failure and powerlessness in the face of learning is reinforced for them.

These pupils see no connections between their education generally and their lives outside the school. In fact, education is perceived as an intrusion on their personal space. In terms of language learning, they can be described as disaffected, with little relationship to the subject, to the extent that it is often difficult to get them to speak about it. Surprisingly, however, they later show some integrative tendencies, which possibly links in to their somewhat unrealistic beliefs about the nature and purposes of language learning, namely to be able to have conversations in another language just as they can in English. They respond to extrinsic motivation in the form of rewards and punishments to a certain extent, though they have such little respect for their teachers that these become more of a game or a battle than a stimulus to any real learning.

Their unrealistic beliefs about what they should be able to do in another language leads to an incongruence between their own beliefs and their knowledge about the nature of language learning in the school, which is thus condemned as 'crap'. Their only positive experiences are when they are

working in small groups, as they are able at best to support each other's learning, at worst (and more commonly) to form allies against the teacher. Possibly for this reason they are offered few opportunities to work in this way as the teacher tries to keep control of the class through teacher-centred, undemanding copying activities. Their disconnection from the business of learning languages is reflected in their confusion over the purposes of specific tasks.

These pupils are completely disaffected by school in general, and by language learning specifically, and believe that they are being victimised. In order to maintain some element of control over the situation, their only form of resistance is active disruption, which of course leads to negative outcomes in the form of an increasingly serious breakdown in communication with their teacher, and escalating failure and disaffection.

8.6.3. The Sophisticates

The Sophisticates have very strong beliefs in the active role which the learner should play in learning, and in the idea that the learner is ultimately responsible for learning outcomes. They are largely confident that they are able to assume this role, and indeed reveal sophisticated levels of strategic knowledge in the areas of self-regulation and self-management (including self-monitoring and self-evaluation), and are thus able to address their own perceived weaknesses when they arise. Consequently they attribute most constraints on learning to external factors such as the teacher, who sometimes does not live up to their high standards. Both the external and internal factors which can constrain their

control over learning can, however, be challenged and changed to a certain extent, and are therefore perceived as unstable.

The group sees a strong connection between education and their own lives, both in the present and for the future. They show a range of motivations for learning languages, including intrinsic interest in languages themselves, integrative motivation in their desire to meet and work with foreigners, and (to a lesser extent) awareness of the instrumental values of languages. Extrinsic attempts to drive them are, however, perceived as intimidating and harmful to learning.

Because of their beliefs about the nature and purposes of language learning, they would like to see changes in the way languages are taught in school, especially in terms of content, meaning that their general task knowledge and beliefs are incongruent. They appreciate opportunities to learn independently, either as individuals or groups, as this affords them opportunities to take control of their learning through making choices. Their chances of working effectively in this way are enhanced by their strong knowledge of specific tasks, which includes rigorous evaluation criteria.

These pupils strongly desire to influence their language learning diet, and have experienced opportunities do so through active resistance which is considered in terms of its potential for positive outcomes. Nevertheless, there are some signs in Y10 that, despite being considered more mature by teachers, their

influence is limited by some perceived reluctance from teachers to listen to their voices.

8.6.4. The Frustrated

This group believes that learners should be able to take control of their own learning, and they attribute any failure to do so mainly to themselves. They have high expectations of themselves, but do not know how to meet them, thus considering their weaknesses to be stable. Their person knowledge and their beliefs about the learner are therefore highly incongruent, contributing to a sense of frustration and helplessness. This is exacerbated by weak knowledge of self-regulation strategies, particularly in areas which contribute to memorising and activating language, areas they value most highly.

These pupils do not reveal as great a sense of relatedness between school and their own lives as might be expected. They could be described as demotivated rather than disaffected in language learning, as they do reveal some level of instrumental motivation as well as strong integrative tendencies. This demotivation is possibly related not only to their own sense of deficiency but also to the incongruence between what they believe language learning to be about and the kinds of activity they do in their language lessons. This incongruence does not contradict the incongruence between person knowledge and beliefs, however; the connecting factor is the desire to get the language into their heads and out of their mouths, in ways which are possibly unrealistic, and their inability to do so is still largely attributed to themselves. Their own

self-perception is possibly also a reason why they tend to view extrinsic forms of motivation, such as praise or gold slips, with mistrust.

These pupils strongly appreciate the opportunity to work independently as it means that their brains need to be engaged, thus offering some control over learning, and that their individual needs can be met more effectively. The group does reveal self-management knowledge, but they appear to have little awareness of the purposes of different specific tasks.

The frustration of these pupils is largely turned inward, though there is some external attribution which emerges later, whereby they reveal their dissatisfaction with the way in which teachers fail to help them achieve what they expect to achieve. Unfortunately they feel unable to influence this either, as they do not believe that their voices will be listened to. Their resistance is thus passive, taking the form of quiet disengagement in the classroom or even of absenteeism, which of course has no positive influence over the situation.

8.7. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LEARNERS' CONSTRUCTIONS (METACOGNITIVE KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS) AND MOTIVATION

Despite the emergence of distinctive characteristics in each of the four groups, the differences between the groups are so complex that any comparison, in terms of the research questions, can only be tentative. The relative motivations of each group can clearly be seen above, and it appears that there are obvious relationships with aspects of metacognition. The relationships are not clear cut,

however, and it is more in the combinations of different types of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs, the congruence or incongruence between knowledge and beliefs, and external responses to these that the relationships appear to lie. What is suggested, however, is a common set of implications, a radical change in the curriculum to create a far more powerful learning environment which could, in different ways according to individual differences, benefit the learning of all pupils. This will be explored in the final chapter, however. For the moment, it is probably wise to limit the responses to the research question to a brief exploration for each of the groups individually, beginning with the two groups identified as motivated, and then the two identified as demotivated.

8.7.1. The Grafters

It is easy to see why this group is perceived by teachers as motivated. They generally relate to school and do not display any resentment for being there. They take responsibility for their own learning, working hard on the whole, and do not blame others excessively for any problems with learning. They have a picture of the purposes of language learning, and generally feel satisfied that, if they could overcome their own problems with concentration, they would achieve what they wanted to achieve. Yet despite their perceived shortcomings, they are generally satisfied, possibly because they only have modest expectations anyway, and have some degree of metacognitive knowledge which is adequate for their perceived needs, as well as some understanding of how to manage their learning.

In summary, they want to learn something, do not expect too much from this, and have some degree of awareness of what they are doing and how to do it, sufficient to keep them going.

The perceived lack of power to control either themselves or their learning context is, however, potentially problematic. If they continue to view the obstacles to learning as stable factors over which they have no control, they could start to be resentful, and begin to reattribute their problems to others, such as their teachers (as indeed could be seen in Y10). If they are then also unable to voice this and influence what is happening, they could become increasingly disillusioned, probably in a passive way.

Most of all, this group would benefit from development of their strategic knowledge, in particular their self-regulatory strategies, and from increasing opportunities to manage their own learning accompanied by awareness of the nature and purpose of specific tasks.

8.7.2. The Sophisticates

These pupils have a strong sense of the importance of education in their lives, and either enjoy being in school on the whole or are prepared to suffer it because of the future benefits it will bring. They take responsibility for their own learning outcomes, and are confident enough to believe that they can address any weaknesses in their learning through their highly developed strategic knowledge and their understanding of self-management, which, underpinned by a strong awareness of the purposes of specific tasks, enables

them to plan, monitor and evaluate their own learning, and then to set targets. They have high expectations, and this sometimes leads to disagreements with teachers, but on the whole they resolve these in a mature way through negotiation (and through occasional clashes).

The group clearly wants to learn, has high expectations and is able to meet these through their own means, influencing the learning environment to facilitate this when necessary. In other words, they have strong internal and external voices.

These pupils could be expected to continue to learn in a motivated way. There is a danger, however, that if the incongruence between their general task beliefs and their general task knowledge is not addressed by external changes to the curriculum, these external unstable attributions could become perceived as stable and lead the group to doubt their power to influence. Despite their own internal voice, they could come to resent this, as they become frustrated by the curriculum on offer. If this happens, given the active nature of their resistance, they could become confrontational.

The group needs genuine opportunities to continue to manage their own learning and make real choices about what they learn and how. They need open structures in which their concerns can be heard and acted on.

8.7.3. The Angry Victims

It is understandable that these pupils are perceived by their teachers as demotivated. They do not relate to school at all, nor does it relate to them. Their alienation from school processes is intensified when they are in language lessons for a number of reasons: firstly, they are not taught to be able to use the language in the same way that they can use English, and are instead subjected to a series of bewildering activities; secondly, they believe they are victimised by teachers for their perceived inability to learn the language. Needless to say, they believe that they are unable to (or should) take any control of their learning, apart from through openly resistant behaviour, well deserved by the teacher.

It is hard to envisage any future for this group's learning other than a downward spiral. What they would have benefitted from most of all (and, if we remain optimistic, could still benefit from), is more guided reflection on the nature of learning and the active role of the learner, more strategic knowledge and awareness of the purpose of specific tasks to allow them successfully to take on a more active role, and reflection on what can realistically be expected from language learning in school. As with other groups, opportunities to satisfy their desire for contact with speakers of the other languages, would enable them to develop this motivation.

8.7.4. The Frustrated

These pupils are perceived by their teachers as capable but demotivated. This is possibly due to their frustration, resulting from high expectations of themselves

and of language learning, and a perceived inability to live up to this. This leads to withdrawal in class, where they remain silent, unenthusiastic and, possibly, increasingly absent. Unlike others in the class, they do not voice their learning problems, which are mainly to do with memorising and producing language, and simply appear uninterested.

There is a real danger that this group could become more disaffected over time. They have little internal control over learning, and a belief that they cannot express their voice externally in order to influence their environment. The most obvious benefits to this group would be gained from a curriculum which enabled them to reflect on the expected (realistic) outcomes of language learning in school, and developed their strategic knowledge, whilst offering them more self-management opportunities with real choice so that they could influence the content and practise what they need to practise. They would of course need to have the opportunity to learn more about the nature and purposes of specific tasks.

8.8. SUMMARY

It is impossible to produce any useful overall summary of this analysis, looking for detailed patterns across the groups. It is probably more satisfactory to read the summaries of the groups in the thumbnail sketches in order to understand the intricate nature of the data, and then to move to the general conclusion which will make several broad and interrelated claims: firstly, that motivation is enhanced when learners have a voice in the management of the whole learning process, including influence over the content; and secondly, that this

relationship to motivation will be stronger if it is accompanied by opportunities to develop all aspects of metacognitive knowledge so that they may learn not only that, as learners, they can have control of and responsibility for learning, but also to explore what this learning might realistically consist of, how to identify and use learning resources effectively, and how to learn in ways which enable their expectations to be met.

The conclusion also refers to the dynamic nature of the relationships between metacognition and motivation, which suggests not only that they can change over time, but also that all aspects relate to one another in variable ways according to individual pupils' constructions. This dynamic interplay of factors cannot be reduced to a simple formula, nor should it be on the basis of this research. However, it may be useful to finish this section with two hypothetical statements as examples of some of the potential relationships. The intention is not to provide an exhaustive list of hypothetical relationships, and indeed any attempt to do so would be far too reductive. However, they are indicative of the complexity of this area of research, even within one very narrow context, and suggest the need at least for teachers to understand the significance of their own learners' constructions, and the relationships between these and their motivation, as well the need to listen to their learners' voices in order to offer learning environments which will enable their individual needs to be met.

Hypothetical statements

1. It is important for motivation that PB* includes the location of control internally to the learner, but PK/PB and TK/TB congruence or incongruence can relate to this in different ways, e.g. if a learner believes that s/he should be responsible for learning (PB), but cannot live up to these expectations (PK), possibly through strategic knowledge (SK) which does not match the learner's own expectations of the learner (PB), motivation may or may not be affected. Whether it is or not may relate to levels of congruence between TK and TB: for example, there is potential for sustained motivation if expectations of language learning (TB) are modest and experienced as such in school (TK); however, if language learning in school (TK) does not live up to expectations (TB), then the combination of this with internal locus of control beliefs (PB), and incongruent PK/PB can be lead to frustration and demotivation. (An example of SK which does not match a learner's expectations is when memory is believed to be important but the necessary self-regulatory strategies are underdeveloped.)

2. If language learning in school does not live up to expectations (TK/TB incongruence), demotivation may not necessarily ensue if the learner construes this external constraint on learning as unstable, and if this is reinforced by the learner's continuing experience of active, positive resistance.

* For the sake of brevity, initials have been used for the different aspects of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs. (PB = Person Beliefs, etc)

8.9. CONCLUSION

As I have suggested, any attempt to produce a detailed grand theory of relationships between motivation and specific aspects of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs to synthesise all of the findings from the four groups would deservedly be criticised as an attempt to overclaim. I already feel some discomfort at reducing groups of individuals to thumbnail sketches, as I realise that the sum does not necessarily apply to each of the parts all of the time. However, as I have already stated, I was surprised myself by the overall consistency within the groups, and am therefore confident that these sketches are valid, if tentative.

To return to my original broad question, however, what does emerge as common across the four groups is the suggestion that motivation, if it is to be sustained, requires opportunities for learners to understand and believe that they have an active role to play in learning, and to be able to meet the demands of that role through appropriate forms of metacognitive knowledge. However, this involves changes in classroom structures to enable learners to put that role into practice: the curriculum needs to enable them to develop the person, task and strategic knowledge which, in combination will enable them to influence effectively the nature of the curriculum so that it relates to their specific motivations; in turn, they then need opportunities to use this knowledge to make effective choices and exert positive control over the content of the curriculum. This adds up to a curriculum which enables learners to experience the competence, relatedness and autonomy proposed by Deci and Ryan (1991) as essential to intrinsic motivation. It suggests a way of fostering "the development of autonomy and the growth and regulation of motivation from inside" seen by Ushioda (2003: 100) as essential to sustained motivation. In other words, motivated learners feel willing and able to take responsibility for learning, and are provided with genuine opportunities to do so.

It seems safe to claim that self-management opportunities alone will not sustain motivation if metacognitive knowledge in all of its aspects is not developed, as the learner will eventually feel incompetent to work effectively and in a satisfying way, even if, as appears likely, this is the mode of learning most likely to be preferred. It could even be suggested that it is less important to offer self-management opportunities than to develop self-regulation. Perhaps

learners are more likely to be motivated by knowing what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how they can best do it, even if they are not allowed to manage their overall learning programme. It is, however, impossible to claim this here, and indeed, a major problem emerges immediately if we follow that train of thought: it offers the learners no opportunity to influence the content of the curriculum to ensure that it relates to their individual needs and expectations. Control is then directed internally only, not externally (Benson's (1997) technical and psychological autonomy as compared with his political autonomy), and this could encourage interpretation from a deficit perspective requiring most of the change to come from the learners, frustrating their need for a relevant curriculum which connects with their lives and which empowers them.

To conclude, just as Ushioda (1996a) has suggested that motivation itself may be dynamic, changing over time (a proposal which may also offer some explanation of the changes in the four groups over the period of research), the relationship between autonomy and motivation also appears to be dynamic, not linear. What can be seen from this analysis, is that all of those aspects of autonomy (person, task and strategic knowledge and beliefs, self-regulation and self-management) and of motivation (locus of control and attributional beliefs, as well as relatedness and motivational orientation) investigated here, are also related to each other in dynamic ways. It is the interplay of all of these factors which constitutes the relationship between autonomy and motivation, and this interplay can change over time, according to not only individual differences, but also contextual factors.

8.10. POSTSCRIPT

At the end of Y11, a year and a half after our final meeting, these pupils sat their GCSE examinations. Though this research has not directly considered the relationships of motivation and autonomy to achievement or the contested construct of ability, apart from very briefly in the literature review, it is interesting to note these results which can be seen in Appendix 11. They are listed by group, and show the grades for each of the four GCSE modules, and the overall points score and final grade.

It would be very interesting to revisit my data now in order to trace the contributions of individual pupils in these conversations, and to try to interpret them in the light of these individual results. However, this is beyond the remit of this thesis. I do believe, however, that I got to know the pupils as individuals throughout the research and analysis process, despite my original thinking that it would be difficult to separate out individual constructions within the groups, as it would be impossible to know what was influenced by the group context. Perhaps it will be worth revisiting the data in this light at a later date.

9. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1. INTRODUCTION

Early in my research, I was asked what my contributions to knowledge might be. At that time I nervously responded that I could not foresee what they might be, but that there had been little research into the relationship between learner autonomy and motivation in language learning, and that to explore this in a particular school context was bound to result in a contribution to knowledge. As the research progressed and became increasingly focused, the potential contributions began to increase: for example, exploration of metacognitive knowledge in a secondary school context in England was limited, and the links with motivation even more so; the development and application of new research methods would also contribute to our deeper understanding of the question. When I proceeded to the analysis of the data, the complexity of the relationships between the different elements of my research began to emerge, suggesting that all of the elements were of significance to motivation, though apparently in dynamic, different and changing ways and combinations; furthermore, the emergent understandings of ways in which metacognitive knowledge and beliefs may differ from as well as relate to each other became significant to my explorations of the question; and the pupils' varying constructions of the ways in which they do or do not have a voice in their learning, including voice as self-regulation, self-management and resistance, contributed to this complex picture.

Possibly the greatest contribution to knowledge, however, has resulted from my research commitment to listening to the voices of the learners, to

understanding language learning from their perspective, and to considering the implications of this for the 'problem' of a learning context which contributes to differential levels of motivation. Early in this thesis, I reflected that this commitment led to a sense of unease on my part in focusing the research on *my* questions, and that, in gaining access to the learners' constructions, I needed to ensure that my research was enabling rather than constraining. My solution was to locate my focused questions within a data-collection context which encouraged the pupils to identify their own issues and priorities, and the outcome of this is a picture of secondary language learning which offers us ways forward to a more inclusive, powerful language learning curriculum.

This final chapter will thus attempt to summarise the implications of this study for researchers, practitioners and policy makers. The intention is not to repeat in detail the results of the explorations, as these have been described, summarised, analysed, and reflected on already throughout this thesis. This chapter will instead be more speculative in nature, whilst attempting to remain rooted in the research itself. Speculation is, of course, dangerous, as Hammersley (1999: 17) has warned:

> "This may take the form of asserting the validity of their findings with more certainty than they should. It may also involve going beyond reasonable conclusions to make all sorts of further speculative claims, both factual and value-laden, yet without making the speculative character of these explicit".

However, I stated at the beginning that my research is not disinterested, and I also stated that I was committed to finding ways in which contextual changes may respond to the learners' voices. My ethical commitment to action, to speaking with the learners and ensuring that their voices are heard, must now

extend to proposals which can move us in that direction, at both the micro- and the macro-level (since issues at both levels informed the research in the first place). These proposals can still only be tentative, based as they are on a very small study, but nevertheless the research agenda must be taken forward on a practical level as well as at the level of further research.

9.2. REFLECTING ON MY RESEARCH QUESTION

My focused research question asked the following:

What relationships are there between learners' constructions of language learning and their motivation in this urban secondary school?

I explored this question by defining constructions as metacognitive knowledge (Person, Task and Strategic Knowledge and Learner Beliefs), and by focusing on particular aspects of motivation (locus of control, attribution, relatedness) which had emerged from my literature review as being relevant either to learner autonomy (part of the broader question which had stimulated the research) or to the urban context of the research.

What I found was a picture of complexity, not a simple formula, with dynamic relationships between the different elements of the research, and emerging distinctions between metacognitive knowledge and beliefs, which related to each other as well as to the other elements. The picture was made even more complex by the evidence (from the context of the focused group conversations themselves) that all of the elements are themselves dynamic, emergent, changeable, and subject to external influences.

Though there can be no denying that individual differences between learners are significant to the individual motivations which emerge, it is clear that external aspects need to change if learners are to be, and remain, motivated. This does not mean an increase in extrinsic motivational strategies, but rather the creation of a learning environment which includes not only opportunities for self-managed learning with real choice for learners, but also for reflection on and development of the different aspects of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs. The need to develop metacognition has, of course, been often stated in literature on learner training (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair, 1989; Jiménez Raya, 1998, 2003; Lai, 2001; Sinclair and Ellis, 1992; Victori and Lockhart, 1995) and this extends beyond the need for strategy training to include knowledge and beliefs (though strategies have been the main focus of research in this field). Nevertheless, what I have learned from this research is that within this context, denial of opportunities to reflect on learner beliefs and to develop appropriate metacognitive knowledge (which will be influenced by the contextual experiences of the learners) suppresses learners' motivation and can lead to more extreme disaffection, even when there are opportunities to choose learning tasks. Furthermore, indications of changes over time in the groups suggest strongly that even sophisticated levels of metacognitive knowledge and beliefs do not guarantee sustained motivation, if opportunities are not included to influence the content and process of learning and relate it to individual, emergent constructions.

The research suggests then that a learning environment which is inclusive in the sense of providing opportunities for individual motivations to be sustained, would include the following elements: reinforcement of beliefs which include a sense of learner control, for example exposing learners to experiences in which they learn that they can influence potential constraints, internal or external, on their learning; opportunities to reflect on task beliefs to ensure that learners are able to identify what they expect (both goals and processes) from language learning; responsiveness to these individual beliefs through increased flexibility in the learning environment; opportunities for learners to recognise that their expectations may still be unrealistic, constrained as they are by time, resources etc, and to adjust them accordingly in ways which are still acceptable to them; opportunities for learners to develop an understanding of how they can most effectively achieve their individual goals, through access to a choice of learning tasks as well as opportunities to consider which would be most appropriate for the learner's goals to be achieved; opportunities to develop appropriate learning strategies which enable learners to achieve their goals in ways which relate to their preferences, as well as resistance strategies which enable them to negotiate the optimum conditions for learning. The picture is one of constant dialogue similar to that proposed by Dam and Legenhausen (1999), though the focus on motivation in my research throws up in even sharper focus the need for dynamic, ongoing negotiation which will involve compromise, not just from the learner, but also from the learning context, as well as awareness, not only of individual needs, but also of possibilities.

In Chapter One, I discussed ways in which educational inequalities can be understood as arising from social structures which reinforce differences in power, despite the resistance offered by the disenfranchised. In this way, disaffection was reconceptualised as a search for a voice in a context of disenfranchisement. The above implications of this small piece of research suggests ways in which the learning environment may enable all learners to become more powerful, to be *enfranchised*, offered real opportunities to use their voices to influence learning in positive ways, if we are critically aware of the often subtle ways in which power is exerted on them. These voices include internal voices, those which relate to the awareness and development of aspects of metacognition and which arise from and build on the learners' own beliefs and knowledge, enabling them to develop more powerful learning through self-regulation; external voices, those which enable learners to make authentic choices about their learning through a flexible curriculum and learning environment, enabling them to influence their learning in powerful ways through self-management; and voices of positive resistance, which enable them to recognise and challenge the inevitable attempts to constrain their power, through critical awareness, negotiation and compromise. Reflecting on my research, it is possible to see how the Angry Victims perceived themselves as possessing none of these voices, whereas the Sophisticates perceived themselves as possessing all to a certain extent, a perception which was, however, gradually being eroded by experiences which suggested that their voices of positive resistance were perhaps not being heard as well as they hoped. The other two groups possessed some elements of these voices, but their motivation was being compromised by the missing elements. This

research therefore suggests a more complex picture than that offered by Williams et al. (2002); whereas they were particularly concerned that low ability pupils are likely to 'give up' as far as effort is concerned, my research suggests that, within this particular context at least, there is a high risk of this happening to all pupils, regardless of 'ability', if their voices are not developed and heard. Motivations may vary, but over time can be eroded to demotivation and potentially disaffection. This divergence from the earlier research may, of course, be a result of the different research methodology as much as the specific context.

Reflecting on the *urban* dimension of my research question, it is impossible to claim any urban specificity to these research outcomes without carrying out some comparative research. So was it worth including this? I would argue that in fact the inclusion of the urban dimension was crucial to my research for a number of reasons: firstly, it contributed to my autobiographical and theoretical positioning, and hence to my research commitments, leading me to focus on learners' voices, including those which are seldom heard, namely the disaffected; secondly, the situated nature of both autonomy and motivation means that any analysis of this research, carried out in an urban school facing challenges which are common in inner city areas, can only be interpreted within an understanding of the urban context; thirdly, the urban context can be understood in broader terms than the city anyway, suggesting that any study in England should take into account its 'urban' nature and its history of inequality.

However, despite the fact that this research has been influenced by macropolitical critical theory, such as the construction of England as an advanced capitalist society (see references to Castells (1977, 1978) in Chapter One), I also said that I did not wish to distance my research from the microcontext of the school and the learners within it. Nevertheless, at this level, the urban alienation of particular groups is paralleled in the severe disconnection between some of these pupils and the social structure of the school around them. This disconnection can be perceived through the children's voices and suggests the need for radical change in the structures of education if all learners are to be engaged in the process of learning. The disconnection is experienced in many ways by these pupils, ranging from the content and processes of education as a whole, perceptions of teacher understandings and expectations, perceived irrelevance of learning to future plans, the content of the language learning curriculum, the teaching and learning styles which prevail and, in fact, the language and discourse practices of some of the pupils themselves which do not 'fit in' with modes of communication expected in educational contexts. It is also evident in the incongruence between the elements of metacognitive knowledge and learner beliefs as defined in my research. The importance of relatedness for intrinsic motivation is stated clearly here by Ushioda (1996):

> "Learning that harnesses intrinsic motivational processes is above all learning that has personal meaning and relevance reflecting self-perceptions of skill, competence and potential...[...]...In short, intrinsically motivated learning is not learning simply for the sake of learning, but learning that is clearly embedded in living." (Ushioda, 1996: 41-42)

Listening to the voices of some of the pupils in my research suggests that their learning environment does not manage to offer such 'personal meaning and relevance' and is certainly not 'embedded in living', and that intrinsic motivation will thus be frustrated. What is also clear from this research, however, is that listening to these voices offers rational, concrete ways forward, and that listening to the learners should therefore be the first step to take in redesigning the curriculum. After a brief reflection on my research methods, it is to this curriculum that I shall turn.

This research has shown that pupils *are* interested in talking about their learning, (even if, for some children, this is dominated by teacher-focused talk). We have seen this in other research, even though some of this suggests a lack of awareness or a lack of an appropriate language to use (Lee et al., 1998; Williams et al., 2002). Some research, however, seems to imply that learners are unwilling to talk about more complex aspects of their learning; when Chambers (1998, 1999) asked pupils in a questionnaire how their learning of German could be enhanced, 70% did not answer. It may be assumed, though, that the rich data which has arisen from my own research has emerged because of the way in which it was designed. This includes not only the instrument of the focused group conversation, but also the consideration of role and questioning techniques which were integral to deployment of the instrument. Of course, this depended to a large extent on my own experience of teaching children, but this only endorses the potential for use of such instruments in schools. The group processes which occurred in the focus group conversations, and which allowed the construction of opinions and beliefs, were in fact closer

to some classroom practices than individual or group interviews would be, and it is not difficult to imagine how they may be integrated into the life of the school, as part of the curriculum, or in other areas such as the School Council. The point made by some pupils that they were more comfortable talking to me than they would be talking to their language teachers suggests a role for form teachers, trained classroom assistants, or peer researchers. In fact, my experience endorsed Powney and Watts' (1987: 40-1) statement that it is essential for 'respondents' to have trust and confidence in the researcher, which suggests that someone internal to the school may be more suitable than someone external. Possibly it was thanks to my 'semi-internal' status that the pupils responded so well, though it still took several meetings for some of the groups to open up.

9.3. TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE, POWERFUL LANGUAGE LEARNING CURRICULUM

When deciding on the way in which I would report my analysis, I had to decide whether to report what was said directly, or whether to interpret it, turning it round to indicate what it implied for good practice. This question was raised by Watts and Ebbutt (1987), whose interviews with children had indicated such negative views of science that they found themselves launched into "an infectious downward spiral of awfulness" (p. 31). This led Watts and Ebbutt to refocus their analysis, drawing out perceptions of good practice by reversing what was said. My decision was that this would be unacceptable to my commitment to voice, and that I would report what was said, no matter how negative it may be.

In this section, however, I would like to interpret the pupils' voices in order to propose a powerful languages curriculum which may address the problems of differential demotivation and disaffection and, possibly, underachievement in secondary schools. As an interpretation it has its limitations, and would benefit from further discussion with the pupils themselves. Nevertheless, I believe it important to offer this interpretation, and hope that it is close enough to the data to be recognisable and acceptable to the pupils. In addition, it offers an interesting comparison with the scheme of work as devised by the school and indeed with the one which I devised as a teacher. The flexible learning schemes as organised in these two schools were certainly closer to the following than traditional teacher-centred learning, but it is clear that more needed to be done to offer really powerful learning opportunities.

The underpinning theory is that, in a negotiated curriculum, there is an implication of partnership, and that authentic partnership necessitates a learning environment which empowers pupils and in which they can sustain this empowerment themselves (since otherwise it is yet again something being 'done to' pupils). 'Powerful' here implies opportunities for all three types of voice to develop and be heard: internal, external, and voices of positive resistance. Such a curriculum would include the following aspects.

9.3.1. Begin with the learner

In order for pupils to relate to language learning, there is first a need for language learning to relate to them. This includes a readiness to begin with

pupils' existing metacognitive beliefs and knowledge in order to avoid "the dramatic loss of 'sense of self-as-a-learner'" which can result from a failure on the part of the learning environment to recognise existing "learning patterns" (Johnston and Johnston, 1997: 1). It also includes finding out about children's linguistic backgrounds and drawing such experiences into the lesson. It requires tools to enable the pupils to develop their skills in articulating their constructions, and to build on their knowledge and self-awareness so that they may be empowered through the development of reflective skills. The purpose is not to address deficiencies, but to value what already exists whilst offering additional information. As can be seen from this research, there is a range of differences in individual constructions, and learners can thus learn from each other. For example, narrow perceptions of usefulness, construed in terms of usefulness for careers or for adult life (e.g. Graham, 2002; Lord, 2002; Stables and Wikeley, 1999), which are beginning to encourage a focus on language learning for vocational purposes, are challenged by the pupils in this research, who voice a number of reasons why languages may potentially be enjoyable and enriching. Similarly, the surprising integrative tendencies amongst many of the pupils, again at odds with much questionnaire-based research (e.g. the ATLAS project (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/calt/atlas/index.html) which reported that only 55% of the Y10 and Y11 pupils surveyed replied positively to the statement 'I am interested in the language and culture'; see also O'Reilly Cavani, 2001), suggest that we need to be wary of stressing the instrumental value of languages.

9.3.2. Offer opportunities to examine existing beliefs and knowledge critically

Beginning with the learner is not, however, an argument for limiting education to the level of the learners. It is there to challenge certain attitudes, encouraging open-mindedness and self-criticality. In other words, we do not want to use our power to constrain potential, thereby reinforcing social reproduction, but rather to develop confidence to move into and engage with new worlds. As Giroux argues, this involves "teachers and students recovering their own voices so that they can tell their own histories and in so doing check and criticise the history they are told against the one they have lived" (Giroux, in Freire and Macedo, 1987: 15). For example, pupils may have developed beliefs in external locus of control, and need to be given opportunities to examine these critically, and to experience ways in which they can themselves influence learning, reflecting, for example, on their learning strategies. Both Crookes and Schmidt (1991) and Baars (1988) have suggested that strategies such as the selection of appropriate goals and the ongoing re-evaluation of these goals, as well as constant review of learning procedures, can facilitate a revision of such motivational beliefs. Similarly, task beliefs need to be reflected on, and considered within the constraints of the learning context. It may be that pupils expect to be able to do the same in a foreign language as they can in their first language, within an unrealistic timeframe, and this is a possible explanation for the perceived difficulty of the subject even amongst the higher attainers, as also reported by Graham (2002) in her quantitative research with French learners in Y11, 12, and 13. Discussion should enable them to reconsider this, and find

compromises which are still acceptable, bearing in mind that it is important for them to set their own ultimate goals (see also Lim, 2002; Little, 1999a).

9.3.3. Examine the curriculum critically

It is important that the curriculum is also examined critically in order to avoid unnecessary constraints. As far as possible, the learning experience should relate to the learners' constantly changing motivations and expectations, and this will require flexibility to cater for a range of task beliefs, including different motivational orientations. This implies a dynamic process, not something done at the beginning of the unit of work. If we consider the classroom as an institutional structure, we must recognise, as Giddens (1984) suggests, that structure needs to be a continuous process of 'structuration', in which structures are constantly reproduced or modified according to the needs, desires and values of the actors. The implication of this is that the way in which the class and the lesson content is organised should be subject to a constant process of review, and be flexible enough to be able to adapt to the needs of the moment, thus sustaining coherence of shared purpose (Giddens, 1977). Of course this can itself be a constraining process, so there is a need for openness of processes to satisfy learners that they do have a voice.

The pupils in my research have offered many insights into ways in which the languages curriculum can be enhanced, can be related to them, providing evidence that there is much to be gained by listening to them, and much that may surprise us in what they say. The following are just a few of the pupils' suggestions:

- A broad range of meaningful content which is not simply a vehicle for language development, or just focused on transactional, 'tourist' or vocational language, but enables them to have something to talk about to native speakers e.g. history, geography, culture
- Coherent sequencing of syllabus, with pupil input
- Care when revising topics to avoid perceptions of needless repetition
- Increased opportunities for contact with native speakers
- A focus on speaking which will enable them to have 'normal' everyday conversations, including learning how to ask questions
- Authentic materials, e.g. television programmes, and exposure to artifacts
- Authentic tasks, including reduction of mindless copying and careful exploitation of materials to avoid artificiality as far as possible
- Varied classroom experiences, including opportunities for individual and group work, use of video, flashcards, language master, games, song and dance, reading books, clear and audible listening activities
- Clear explanations of nature and purpose of tasks (by teacher or as self-access)
- Targeted teacher responses to questions to avoid unnecessary repetition
- Opportunities to choose what they do, to learn in different ways, and to assess themselves
- Development of learning skills and strategies
- Opportunities for a range of out-of-school experiences

9.3.4. Create a self-managed learning environment

Individual needs demand a learning environment in which they can be met and, to be manageable, this will require learner involvement in the management of this environment. The pupils in my research have identified the benefits of this, such as opportunities to work at their own pace and at their own level, using preferred learning styles to access tasks and content which interest them and match their individual motivations. Van Lier (1996: 57-65) also suggests that practice should not be externally controlled as part of a sequenced programme determined in advance, but rather should be guided according to individual needs. However, such flexible learning arrangements should not be limited to language *practice*, defined by Van Lier as a form of rehearsal necessary for moving 'intake' to 'proficiency' (ibid.). My research echoes that of Bennett et al. (1984), which concluded that there also needs to be opportunities to access *new* knowledge in this way (p. 213). Collaborative groupwork in Malaysia (Lamb, 1998a) and Cyprus (Varanoglulari, 1999) are examples of ways of making the curriculum more learner-centred (Nunan, 1988), where "learners themselves are responsible for the information input, thereby ensuring its relevance and topicality for each particular group" (Campbell and Kryszewska, 1992: 5).

9.3.5. Development of metacognitive knowledge, skills and strategies

The curriculum needs to offer opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and strategies which will make learning more powerful. My research has suggested that learning strategies are only part of the whole picture of what makes a good language learner, and that it is necessary to develop these in

tandem with other aspects of metacognitive knowledge if learners are to be able to manage their own learning in a satisfying way. For example, they need to learn what constitutes progress, and how careful target-setting, task selection, self-monitoring and self-assessment can help them to achieve their goals, enhancing their knowledge and skills in these aspects of learning. This is likely, of course, to involve dialogue with the teacher, who may on occasions recommend specific targets or activities, though this needs to be done openly and honestly and learners need to understand the reasons for such interventions, in order to reduce the chance of them perceiving it as a form of unnecessary control.

Purdie and Hattie (1999) have also suggested that learners do not appear to engage in good study behaviour of their own accord, but that when taught to implement effective learning behaviours, then cognitive and effective outcomes are enhanced. The pupils in my study need to learn, for example, that simply spending longer on work is not necessarily effective, or that quantity of tasks is less important than quality and appropriateness. This has implications for extrinsic reward systems which should be employed with care, building on intrinsic motivational beliefs rather than eroding them (see also Ushioda, 2003: 94), in order to encourage powerful learning rather than to control behaviour. They also need to be aware of a range of strategies from which they can select. However, as above, this does not mean that existing ways of working should be disregarded; as Ellis and Sinclair (1989) and Dickinson (1987, 1992) point out, learner training seems to work best when the learner's existing strategies are valued and built on.

9.3.6. Develop structures in which voices of positive resistance can be heard

There will be occasions when different learners for different reasons perceive their power to influence their learning as under threat. As my research identified, this threat may come from other learners, their teachers, the syllabus, the learning environment and resources, or classroom and school processes. Potentially this can lead to frustration and disillusionment, and eventual demotivation. My research suggests that it would be useful to bring this out in the open, empowering learners to be able to examine and monitor critically any possible power imbalance within the classroom, whilst offering structures which enable them to see their group potential as agents able to take part in "social and political reconstruction" (Giroux, 1983: 228), rather than as powerless individuals who can only resist by disrupting or withdrawing. Such structures need to be a normal part of teaching and learning experience, with skills of negotiation being developed. It may operate on a classroom and a whole-school level (Freiberg, 1996; Lloyd-Smith and Davies, 1995). It may also involve the involvement of learners in research, not just passively but actively as researchers, which would enable the curriculum to be enriched by learners' voices speaking for themselves, thus avoiding what Foucault has referred to as "the indignity of speaking for others" (Foucault, 1988: xviii).

9.4. WIDER IMPLICATIONS

This research offers a useful agenda for schools to explore. However, it also suggests further avenues for the Government to explore as it endeavours to

develop a languages curriculum which contributes to its twin goals of community cohesion and educational inclusion (DfES, 2002a), offering language learning which has the potential to encourage engagement with different linguistic communities and to relate to all learners from any background. It also proposes ways of offering learners "access to flexible teaching and learning in modern foreign languages", as proposed in the Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 reform (DfES, 2004a: 43). In addition, it offers ways forward in encouraging learning qualities as identified in this 14-19 report (DfES, 2004a: 34-35), which include the following:

> "The reflective and effective individual learner is someone who is personally aware...and is aware of how best they learn...and who shows resilience, perseverance and determination. Such learners have the skills and attributes necessary to:
>
> - Organise and regulate their own learning;
> - Set and meet challenging, but realistic objectives;
> - Manage time effectively;
> - Undertake research;
> - Identify and solve problems;
> - Identify, analyse and evaluate relevant information [...];
> - Think and use their skills creatively."

This definition goes on to describe the "social learner", capable of "challenging or defending a position as appropriate; compromising; mediating and resolving conflict; seeking, understanding and evaluating others' viewpoints and ideas; giving and receiving support and feedback; empathising and understanding the needs of others around them". Finally, the "learner in society and the wider world" is able to "participate constructively", and to "be aware of their rights and responsibilities; have the skills and attributes for active citizenship and the workplace; be morally and ethically aware; and know about other countries and other cultures, and understand and value ethnic, cultural and religious diversity".

The proposed powerful curriculum has the potential to offer an environment in which all of these aspects can be developed. In short, it offers the opportunity for "self-development in a social world" (Wallace, 1996: 68), and can be construed as a manifestation of and preparation for a particular kind of democratic participation, such as that proposed by Anderson (1998) in his studies of education reform in the USA. As in Anderson's theory of democracy, it is possible to see such a curriculum as a hybrid of Dewey's (1927) notion of democratic community (in which local social spaces exist where people can learn the skills of debate necessary for democratic citizenry) and socialist democracy (e.g. Marable, 1996), which pays attention to the economic and structural *constraints* on participation. As such, it has the potential to be a more inclusive curriculum, enabling learners to 'find a voice' and realise their potential in a society based on fundamental power conflicts, and to be active citizens of their classrooms and beyond.

Of course, the curriculum changes suggested in this thesis have significant implications for teachers and teacher development. It is clear that learners cannot be empowered in any way unless their teachers have the knowledge, beliefs and skills to enable them to create an environment which is conducive to this (Tudor, 1996; Wright, 1987). This is illustrated in the differences between the aims of the languages curriculum in the research school and the ways in which they are manifested in the classroom (according to the perceptions of the pupils and limited observation in Phase 1 of the research). This has increasingly been the focus of work in the field of learner autonomy,

which has included theoretical consideration of the relationships between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy as well as practical interventions to enable teachers to experience for themselves autonomous learning through, for example, action research and critical reflection (see, for example, Lamb and Reinders, forthcoming; Lamb and Simpson, 2003; O'Dell, 1997; Sinclair, McGrath and Lamb, 2000). However the extent of the power-sharing required if learners are to find not only their internal and external voices but also their voices of positive resistance will be a serious challenge for teachers and teacher educators, particularly those in England who themselves are working under considerable constraints. I have speculated in the past about the nature of such constraints (Lamb, 2000), but this thesis clearly demands further research in this direction.

9.5. FUTURE RESEARCH

I have drawn attention throughout this thesis to the limitations of the research, and to a certain extent these suggest further research needs. For example, the focus on declarative rather than procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1983, 1985) begs the question of how such knowledge is actually put to use by the pupils, if indeed it is, and how this affects long term motivation. This may also offer an opportunity to explore the relationships with learning and achievement which have only been touched on in this thesis. In addition, it may offer the opportunity to examine classroom practices which, in the focused part of this thesis have only been revealed from the pupils' perspectives, though the methodological problem of accessing learners' constructions of learning whilst they are learning in the classroom would have to be addressed.

However, even without further research, the data collected could be analysed further. My intention was to analyse at the level of the group, but the focused group conversations in fact supplied data which could tentatively be analysed at an individual level, especially in the light of the examination results achieved at the end of Y11. Also, at the level of the language (differences between German and French), I have not carried out systematic analysis, though there has been some recognition that the German scheme of work has been developed further to encourage flexible learning, and that this has on occasions led the French pupils to compare their experiences unfavourably. It can only be conjecture to suggest that this is a factor in the differences in examination results between the two subjects (especially given the problems of staff turnover faced by the school), but it is worthy of further investigation. However, the language being learned was not the focus of my research, and so such an analysis will necessarily be left until later. This is also the case with gender differences; though nothing noticeable emerged from the research, and indeed was unlikely to emerge given the numbers of each gender involved, it would be interesting to revisit the data from this angle.

With regard to the relationship between motivation, autonomy and achievement, I made it clear that, despite organisation of the focused groups according to 'top' and 'bottom' half, this was not in order to consider this as a variable within this research, but to create a more supportive, less threatening environment for all. My main reason for avoiding an exploration of this relationship was to do with problems with defining constructs such as

achievement, attainment and ability, and assigning individual pupils to particular categories in any meaningful way. I also recognised, however, that it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to pay this due attention, as it would require a longitudinal study to note changes in attainment if I was to avoid deficit approaches. (There are enough problems in understanding the relationship between motivation and achievement, let alone adding autonomy.) As I have mentioned above, it would be possible now to reanalyse the data in retrospect with regard to learning outcomes as defined by examination results, though this would still not enable us to identify any causality. Of course, additional assumptions may be drawn into the different groups and how their constructions relate to their 'ability', though these would necessarily be assumptions as we cannot know for sure that the pupils' potential is reflected in their placing in a particular group. Further exploration of this relationship is needed, however.

In addition, the research has unapologetically privileged the voices of the pupils. I do acknowledge, however, that the teachers will probably see the world very differently, and that their voices often remain silenced too. Though this research has enabled a unique picture to emerge, valid and valuable in its own right, and has responded to a real need to focus on learners' voices, I do not deny that a complementary focus on the teachers' perspectives would be useful, as would the opportunity to bring the voices together. My original intention was to have a further research phase in which the pupils would identify further questions and explore them through their own research, feeding back the results to the teachers themselves. A necessary outcome of that (and

indeed of the research as it already stands) would be for the teachers to discuss how to use the research in order to instigate change, and would make the research really transformational. Unfortunately it was not possible within the scope of the thesis to do this, but it needs to be done.

From an epistemological perspective, the research was always intended to be descriptive rather than predictive. It was not intended to find ways of determining certain behaviours, but rather describing and interpreting the data in order to suggest possible ways forward. The research has in fact produced very rich description, and a complex picture of the relationships between the factors under investigation. These factors have been summarised at the end of the analysis, and their value as an analytical framework has been demonstrated by the insights gained from this research. Such research needs to continue, exploring the relationships between these factors as far as possible, in order to try to draw up models of the ways in which they may influence each other in different permutations, and how this changes over time.

I have discussed the contextualised nature of the constructs under exploration in this research, which means that caution is needed when considering the implications of the findings for other contexts or broader policy. Nevertheless such constructs will always have to be seen in context, and it is only through further research in other contexts, both similar (other urban schools, for example) and different (rural schools, for example) that a bigger picture may emerge at the macro-level, offering, for example, further evidence of what a specifically urban curriculum might look like. Similarly, the particular context

of this research suggests some homogeneity in socio-economic background, though I am aware that there will still be significant differences between the different pupils' backgrounds and have therefore not drawn any implications with regard to this factor. In order to further our understanding of differential motivation, however, it would be useful to attempt to isolate this variable in similar research and paint a more focused picture.

However, the significance of contextual factors in influencing ways in which learning is construed also raises questions at the micro-level of the classroom. Donato and McCormick's (1994) sociocultural perspective on language learning strategies suggests that development of strategies is situated in a particular context and that they are constantly developing, and therefore cannot be transplanted; and my research suggests that this is the case with all of the constructions explored. If we are to refine our understanding of ways in which the context can enable constructions (both knowledge and beliefs) to develop which contribute to learner empowerment, we need to explore further the question of how the dynamics of this influence operate (see also Ushioda, 2003). As the context is not just at a school level (all the pupils in my research attended the same school after all), this includes the dynamics of the relationships between pupils, teacher and curriculum, all of which contribute to "how the learners variously defined that context and acted upon it" (Breen, 1996: 86). Threats to learner empowerment thus need to be exposed, raising questions similar to those raised by Bruner (1986: 148) in his suggestion that the Zone of Proximal Development represents the danger of control:

> "May it not be the source of human vulnerability because the learner begins without a proper basis for criticizing what is

> being 'fed' to him by ones whose consciousness initially exceeds his own? Is higher ground better ground? *Whose* higher ground? And are those sociohistorical forces that shape the language that then shapes the minds of those who use it, are those forces always benign?"

My research suggests that such vulnerability represents a lack of voice, and asks how learners can find ways not only of examining their learning context critically, but also of *changing* the circumstances of their learning where appropriate in ways which enhance motivation and learning. This thesis proposes ways forward which are apparent from the data collected, but it also implies the need for deeper understanding of the processes involved at the micro-level.

In other words, the thesis concludes with a call for further investigation of how power operates at all levels, in various directions and in dynamic ways, and this once again brings together themes which have run throughout the work: autonomy and motivation, critical theory, voice and agency. Exploring the voices of the pupils, we find that their experience of 'self-management' in the classroom is limited despite a commitment to 'flexible learning' and learner autonomy in the department. Other research has suggested that learners tend to pass decision-making 'upwards' towards the teacher. Waters (1998), for example, in an exploration of the ESOL classroom, draws on the concept of the 'monkey' (i.e. the next move) from management studies, and shows how the learners tend immediately to turn to the teacher when they have a learning problem. Insights from the pupils in this research suggest possible reasons for this, and also ways in which this may be changed. Examining the 'strategies' of power (Foucault in Kritzman, 1988: 104) to discover the ways in which the

pupils still feel controlled by the teacher in an independent learning environment enables us to articulate the ways in which the exertion of power can be taken for granted, accepted as a 'given'. Embraced by some pupils as a substitute for their own engagement, such a subtle, indirect disempowerment also reinforces the feelings of lack of control. Further research needs to continue to 'unpick' why and how power is being exerted, for learners as well as teachers, and may offer further insights into ways of encouraging a critical dialogue about teaching and learning.

9.6. FINAL REFLECTIONS ON MYSELF AS A RESEARCHER

At various points in this thesis, I have reflected on my own development as a researcher. I have been open about the times when I feared my research was 'messy'. Was it acceptable not to know exactly what my focus was before entering the field? Should I have entered the field before reflecting on my own theoretical position based on literature I had met years earlier? Should I have started with detailed and focused literature searches rather than reading broader literature? At times I felt as if I was flouting every research convention, but then I would find some other reference which would turn round my previous readings anyway.

On reflection, I believe there are strong parallels between myself starting out as novice researcher learning how to research, learners learning how to learn and teachers learning how to teach. Initially we believe there is one way of doing things. Initially, my student teachers desperately want techniques, tips, methods, but eventually find that teaching is not straightforward. They then

realise that they must find what works for them, and that the most necessary tool is a rigorous mind. Learners also look for help from others when it comes to learning. They want to follow the instructions, seem reluctant to think for themselves, begin to rely on the teacher for their own learning progress until eventually, if not frustrated along the way, they realise that they have to find their own way of learning. I, as a researcher, also was subconsciously looking for *the* way of doing things, was nervous that I may be doing something wrong, that there was some text which would completely undermine my research, until I realised that there will always be contradictory research paradigms since there are many different ways of viewing the world.

I then realised that, in researching a topic which primarily focuses on ways in which learners can find their voice, their autonomy as learners, I had also learned to find my own voice, my own autonomy as a researcher. I had been researching my own thinking processes by means of my research journal and, as a result, had defined my own research philosophy. I had developed my autonomy in the sense that I could think through what I was doing for myself, with the necessary rigour to ensure that my research was valid and meaningful. In short I had developed a kind of professional *confidence,* just as I hope that language learners would develop confidence in their ability to learn (and student teachers would develop professional confidence as teachers). The process which had led to my confidence as a researcher, confidence which meant that I could take risks, try things out, but with rigour rather than bullishness, was, as in the conclusions to my research, one of reflection on existing knowledge, beliefs and experiences. However, I had also learned that

this reflection must be a critical form of reflection, since it is necessary to resist the kinds of constraint which could undermine confidence and development, constraints which come from a range of sources of power and control, whilst at the same time making acceptable compromises. Reflecting further, however, I recognised a fundamental difference between myself as a researcher, and the pupils (or indeed the teachers). This was that I had the luxury of being able to find my confidence, my autonomy, by working on a field of inquiry which was of my own choosing, which related to my life and experience, and to which I was committed. If I still experienced a sense of constraint given this privileged position, how much more powerful were the constraints on learners' and teachers' autonomy, working in the context of the secondary school.

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APPENDIX 1

Dear Mr G,

As part of my work at the University of Nottingham, I am engaged in research on the teaching and learning of modern foreign languages in secondary schools. The research will in the first instance enable me to complete my PhD, though I have also been invited to use it as the basis for a publication designed to disseminate good practice amongst languages teachers.

The central focus of my data collection will be an in-depth ethnographic case study of language teaching and learning in an urban secondary school. The aims are to examine the extent to which language learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and to explore the effects of this on their motivation and personal commitment to learning. I particularly wish to address the issue of boys' attitudes towards learning though I shall also be working with girls. I first wish to observe the ways in which teachers are already incorporating the ideas of learner autonomy into their classroom practice, and gain insights into their own theories of teaching and learning. At the same time I plan to work with students to find out how they relate to the learning situation, and to discover the potential benefits of metacognitive development. Hopefully this will enable us to reflect on which forms of learner training are most effective at encouraging positive attitudes towards education amongst all students.

I understand from Eva that your languages department is very interested in developing strategies for motivating students. In particular, I know that they have invested a great deal of time in flexible learning programmes, and I would like to work with them on an evaluation of this with a view to maximising its potential. Eva has apparently on one occasion raised this possibility at a departmental meeting, as well as having informal conversations with every member of the department, and the staff have expressed interest. I am therefore writing to you to ask for your permission to come in and discuss the research

further with the department and also with any other interested parties including yourself.

If you agree, I would plan to spend one day per week whenever possible over the next year (October to July) working together with the language teachers. The precise format of this is negotiable with individual staff, but I would envisage classroom observation and participation to be a major activity. Another form of data collection would be formal and informal interviews with both staff and students. In return I would offer some support to the teachers inside and outside the classroom, and could contribute to their professional development by offering them the opportunity to discuss their classroom practice. Together we can explore the factors leading to success or failure, and find ways of encouraging more powerful learning amongst students, including those who may be disaffected. Ways of optimising existing measures to motivate students extrinsically, in order to nurture intrinsic motivation, would be one offshoot of this.

My work is rooted in theories of teaching and learning as central to school improvement, and has connections with work on life-long learning and the development of a learning society. I have also had 16 years experience as a languages teacher largely in inner-city schools in London. My commitment is therefore to finding practical ways of improving learning for all students, especially those who have a history of relating poorly to education. Knowing all the teachers in the languages department personally, I feel confident that I would be viewed positively as someone who can work collaboratively with them in a non-threatening way, and my research design will incorporate measures to ensure that this is the case. The fact that I am also an ex-student of The Borough School would also add an extra dimension to my research.

I would be grateful if you could give this proposal serious consideration as I believe that it would bring benefit to all parties. If you wish to discuss it further, please contact me either at home via Eva or at the above number which is a direct line. I hear that you are also about to get email facilities, in which case you can contact me at Terry.Lamb@nottingham.ac.uk. This facility will also make communication much easier should you and the domain agree to the project.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Lamb
Lecturer in Education

APPENDIX 2

Background information sheet

Date_____

Name_____

Class_____

Tutor_____

Languages teacher _____

SCHOOL SUBJECTS

1. Please number the subjects you study. Start with your most **favourite** and move down to your least favourite, eg 1 = most favourite, 2 = second favourite etc.

For each subject, please explain why you have put it in that position.

English ☐ _____

Design and Technology ☐ _____

Expressive Arts ☐ _____

French/German ☐ _____

Humanities ☐ _____

Maths ☐ _____

PE ☐ _____

RE ☐ _____

Science ☐ _____

2. Now do the same again, this time thinking about which subjects are most **useful** to you now or in the future, and why.

English ☐ _____

Design and Technology ☐ _____

Expressive Arts ☐ _____

French/German ☐ _____

Humanities ☐ _____

Maths ☐ _____

PE ☐ _____

RE ☐ _____

Science ☐ _____

AMBITIONS

1. What do you want to do when you leave school?

2. What would your parents like you to do?

SCHOOL

1. Do you like school? YES ☐ NO ☐
   please tick

Please give reasons for your answer:

2. Think of your favourite teacher. Without mentioning any names, what makes him/her so special?

Thank you for helping me with this research.
Terry.

APPENDIX 3

Meeting 1: Introduction

A: Introduction (5 mins).

1. Thank you for helping with research

2. Letter to parents?

3. Background:

Trying to find out what you feel about school, subjects, in particular languages.

Want to find out how you think and talk about learning - what you find useful, important, enjoyable.

No right or wrong answers - want you to think carefully, but say what you feel.

No one need know who said what - recording simply to help me accurately remember and understand what was said, in your words.

Helping me with the research - my research depends on how seriously you take my questions and how prepared you are to be honest.

6 meetings (45 mins) - hopefully 4 before Easter. (Some of you hopefully help further later next term.)

Will hopefully help to improve language learning here and elsewhere - grateful to language teachers.

4. Background information - fill in form, section 'Ambitions'.

B: Opening question (5 mins).

Ask all students:

1. What's your favourite activity outside school?

C: Background information sheet (10 mins).

D: Introductory question (5 mins).

Brainstorms (using ideas on forms)

1. Let's make a list of what's good about your school.
2. Now let's think about what you like least about your school.

E: Transition question (5 mins).

1. Bearing in mind your ambitions and interests, if you could change one thing about your school, what would it be? (Probe: would you learn any different subjects?)

F: Key questions (10 mins).

Imagine you are the Minister for Education.

Would you say that everyone should learn a language?
Till what age?
How many?
Which language are you learning ?
Would you like to be learning a different language?
Which language? (does it matter?)
What makes that language more important to you?

G: Ending question

If you were the Head teacher wanting to improve your education, which part of today's discussion would you find most useful?

H: Where to now?

1. Language lesson evaluation forms. Please remember to do as carefully as possible.

2. For next time, bring task/activity you were proud of, or felt you did well.

3. Will work out timetable for next time. Do you mind us meeting a couple of times at lunch time ? (Mr P says he can organise an early lunch pass.)

4. Thank you - see you next Monday, same time.

APPENDIX 4

Meeting 2: Self-knowledge

A: Introduction (3 mins)

1. Thanks for coming. Collect lesson evaluations. How did they find using them:
   Which parts, if any, do you think would be of most use to your teacher?
   Which parts are most useful to you as the person learning?
   What do you find useful about these parts?

2. Today's topic is talking about yourself and how you personally learn languages. Everybody learns in different ways, and I'm interested in finding out as much as possible about your ways. You'll need to think quite deeply about things you might not have thought about before, but you can help each other.

B: Opening question (5 mins)

Tell us about a task you've done in your French or German lesson that you feel particularly pleased with, or even proud of. If you've brought it, show us too. (What makes you pleased with it?)

C: Introductory questions (10 mins)

1. Imagine you are your French or German teacher. Write a very brief report about how you did this task.

2. Now add a reply to your teacher telling her how much thought went into the task. Try to describe in as much detail as possible what you were thinking as you worked on it.

3. In turn, try to describe the way you learn to the others in the group.

4. Can you think of any other way of learning which might help you do better?

D: Transition questions (7 mins)

1. Individually, complete the sentences on the sheet *Thinking about learning languages* (see end): (3 mins)

   In French/German I think I'm good at ...because I ...
   In French/German I don't think I'm very good at ...
   I think I'd do better if I ...
   For me the most important thing to learn in French/German is how to ...

2. Let's go round the group and share them. (Ask each of them one of the questions, then ask the others for any comments). (4 mins)

   NB. Whenever they talk about content or skills, try to encourage them to think about **how** they learn.

E: Key questions (15 mins)

1. In two groups of three (boys/girls). You have five minutes to think of someone you think is good at languages (it might be yourself of course!). Think of five pieces of advice they might give to my daughter (who's just started to learn French) to help her do well at it and write them down for her in note form.

2. Now tell the other group what you've put.

3. Which parts of these fit in with your style of learning?
   Which don't?
   What don't you like/do you find difficult about learning that way?
   (How would you do it differently?)
   (What do you think about making mistakes? What do you think people mean when they say someone has a good ear for languages?)

F: Ending questions (5 mins)

1. In order for you to learn French/German better, who needs to change most
- you or the teacher?

2. What makes you think that?

3. Is learning a language different from learning another subject? What is the same/different?

G: Next meeting

Thinking about learning languages

In French/German I think I'm good at …

I think the reason for this is that I …

In French/German I don't think I'm very good at …

I think I'd do better if I …

For me the most important thing to learn in French/German is how to…

APPENDIX 5

Meeting 3: Task knowledge - Part 1

A: Introduction (2 mins)

1. Collect lesson evaluations.
2. Today's meeting is a bit different. I'm interested in finding out what you want to learn in languages, and how you like to be taught.

B: Opening question (3 mins)

1. Where do you usually go on holiday?

C: Introductory questions (5 mins)

1. Have you been on a school trip? What do you think of them?

D: Transition question (5 mins)

Brainstorm about languages:

Supposing you were making a poster to encourage others to learn a foreign language, what would you say is enjoyable? Then useful? Any other reasons why some people enjoy learning them? (Prompts: Think about the language itself, then tasks/activities.)

Now why do some people hate languages? (Prompts: language itself, its usefulness?) (Why are they sometimes the most unpopular subject? Are they rally less useful than others?) (If problematic, ask about tasks too).

E: Key questions (20 mins)

1. Think back to the last unit you completed before Christmas. Let's try to describe step-by-step what happened in the lessons to help you to get to know the new topic.

a) What was the topic?
b) What happened in the first lesson for you to meet the new language?
c) What happened after you had met the new words?
d) Who worked hardest at each stage? (Add T or ST)
e) At which parts did you find yourself working hardest?
f) Which part did you find most enjoyable? (Add smiley faces)
g) In which parts do you learn the most? (Add ! or !!)

2. How does this compare with other subjects? (If it is different which suits you best? Do you understand why it is different?)

3. In groups, imagine you are in some future time when the world is so small that you have to learn a language to survive. You'd really want to learn one then. Now draw the ideal languages classroom of the future.

4. Present it to the others.

F: Final questions (10 mins)

1. Onto flipchart paper - advantages and disadvantages of working as a whole class, in small groups, and independently.
2. Which do **you** prefer? What do you like about it?
3. Which do you like least? What do you not like about it?
4. In every week (2hrs 30 mins), how much time do you think should be spent on each type of activity?

For next time:

1. Bring example of task done recently - also exercise books.
2. Continue with lesson evaluations.

APPENDIX 6

Meeting 4: Task knowledge - Part 2

A: Introduction (2 mins)

1. Collect lesson evaluations.
2. Background information sheets from 9B2.
3. Future meetings: one per group before half-term. Rest after.

B: Opening question (3 mins)

1. In turn, say what you would like to be doing in ten years' time.

C: Introductory questions (5 mins)

1. Do you know someone who does that activity? If so are they good at it? What are they like (appearance, personality, way they work)? (If not, imagine what they would be like).
2. What would you do to make sure you were good at your job? Do you do this for your school work? Why/why not?
3. You all have different ambitions. What should a school do to prepare you for these? Should a school just prepare you for work? Anything else?

D: Transition question (10 mins) (flipchart paper)

1. Brainstorm tasks/activities you do in class and for homework in order to practise listening, speaking, reading writing. (Be as specific as possible eg not just working in pairs, listening to cassette, but what exactly do you do?).
2. Which do you like doing/not like doing? What is it about them that you like/dislike? (eg helpful? fun?)
3. If not already covered, which do you find helpful/less helpful?
4. If not covered, ask about relative importance of helpfulness for learning, fun, practice or productive activities (give examples), activity itself or content.

E: Key questions (20 mins)(re purpose of task)

1. i) What would you like to be able to do with your languages? (What skills would you like to be able to develop?)
   ii) After initial response to this, show examples on handout. Ask for further comments/ideas. (Handout adapted from IATEFL worksheets, 1997)
   iii) If you were a teacher, what kind of tasks/activities would you give your classes (apart from the ones already mentioned above) in order to practise these skills?

2. i) Look at tasks brought by students as examples of their work (possibly in exercise books). Are they good or bad tasks? What is it about them that makes you say that? What are they for?
   ii) Look back at brainstormed list. What are the activities for?

F: Final question (10 mins)

When doing independent work, how do you decide to do one task as opposed to another?

For next time:

1. Bring example of task done **well** recently - also exercise books.
2. Continue with lesson evaluations.

What skills do I want to be able to use my languages for?

I want to use French/German ...	**very important**	**important**	**not very important**
1. to buy things abroad			
2. to speak to new friends from abroad			
3. to read newspapers and magazines			
4. to understand television and radio			
5. to watch foreign films			
6. to read stories			
7. to be able to speak on the phone			
8. to make foreign guests feel welcome at work			
9. to write to friends			
10. in case of emergency abroad			
11.			
12.			
13.			
14.			
15.			

APPENDIX 7

Meeting 5: Strategic knowledge

A: Introduction and opening question (5 mins).

Collect lesson evaluations
Get 9B/2's background information sheets

How are you finding Y10? What are the main differences from Y9? Anything else? What do you like the most about it? What do you dislike?
How are you finding languages in Y10? Have the lessons changed? Reflect on the differences and (where appropriate) the different teaching styles.
What do you know about GCSE? Have you discussed this in class? Is this a good idea? What makes you say that?

B: Introductory questions and transition question (10 mins).

1. On a sheet of paper, list all the opportunities you can think of for practising the new language (in reading, writing, listening or speaking). They can either be things you already do, in class or elsewhere, or things you could do but don't. Be as specific as you can.

   Give yourself a point for every one.

2. Now tick those that you already do. Then count up these points.

3. Now times the first total by the second total to get your overall score.

4. The following are comments made in an American book for language learners (Oxford 1990):

   15+ - GREAT!
   11-14 - WELL DONE!
   7-10 - OK!
   3-6 - BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME
   0 -2 - GOSH!

   What do you think about these comments?
   What advice might you give to yourself after this?
   Will you follow this advice? What might stop you? What would encourage you to do it?
   Do you feel you learn anything at all outside school? What? (brainstorm needed)

C: Transition questions

1. Look at sheet on advising other learners on helpful learning strategies. Discuss each one in turn. (See end: *What advice would you give?*)

2. Thinking about yourself, do you do any of these things? What encouraged you to do what you do? What stops you doing any of these things? What advice would you give yourself?

D: Key questions (on flipchart paper)

1. How do you learn vocabulary? Have you ever done it in a different way? Does it work?

2. If you have a letter in French/German, with questions following it, how do you answer the questions?

3. What do you do if you can't understand some words? Would you always do this? What if you can't look them up?

4. If you are listening to someone speak French/German and want to understand them, what do you do? Would it depend on what they were talking about? Can you explain this? When might you have to listen more carefully? Do you always have to understand everything? What helps you understand?

5. If you want to say something in French/German and don't know the word, what do you do?

6. What do you do when you get your exercise book back with mistakes underlined or corrected? Do you always do this? How often? Why? What if you mark your own work? Could you do anything differently to help you learn from your mistakes? Why don't you always do this?

7. What makes you panic when learning a language? What do you do about it? Do you ever just guess? How do you feel about this?

D: Ending question

1. What do you think the point of today's session was?

2. Have you learnt anything from it? Have you learned this kind of thing in class?

3. What do you consider to be the most important thing you've said? And heard?

What advice would you give?

Read about each of the learners below.

What could each one do to learn better?

Darren

Darren loves watching television and can get German satellite stations. His teacher has told him that this could really help him to learn German better, but he doesn't know how to use it to learn. Should he just watch it? What kind of programmes should he choose? What can he do while he is watching?

Charlotte

Charlotte has just made friends with her new neighbour's daughter. The family has just moved to Sheffield from France. How could she make the most of this to improve her French?

Daniel

Daniel likes reading, and would like to be able to read some things in French. What kinds of things should he read? How will this help him? Should he just read, or do something else as he reads?

Claire

Claire is going on the exchange to Austria where she will be living with an Austrian family for ten days. How can she make the most of this to improve her German. What do you think she might find particularly difficult? What can she do about this before she goes and when she is actually there?

Anthony

Anthony has a long bus journey to school every day. He wants to use this time to improve his French. What could he do?

Jodie

Jodie has never really seen the point of learning German and doesn't enjoy it. However, her cousin has just got a job as an air stewardess which she loves. Jodie likes the idea of this but she's found out that she needs to learn a language. What should she do?

APPENDIX 8

Meeting 6: Evaluating language teaching and learning

A: Introduction (2 mins).

1. Final session. Started with classroom observation, then these focus group meetings to find out your views.
2. 9B2 - background information forms.

B: Opening question (5 mins).

Ask all students:

Do you have older brothers/sisters/friends who have done languages at school? Did they do GCSE? How did they do? Better or worse than in other subjects? What caused that do you think? Has it affected your attitudes towards languages?

C: Introductory question (8 mins).

What makes a good teacher?
What makes a good learner?
What motivates someone who enjoys learning something? (What does motivate mean to you?) Why do they enjoy learning one thing and not another?
What demotivates?

D: Transition question (5 mins).

How many language teachers have you had?
How were they different? Did they teach differently?

E: Key questions

Section 1 (10 mins)

1. What makes a good lesson? (How do you decide if a lesson is good or bad?
2. What do *you* do if you don't like the lesson? (What do others do?)
3. Does this change the situation?
4. How else might you change the situation? (role of the School Council?)

Section 2 (5 mins)

Brainstorm: What would be useful to do if we are to improve language lessons?

(Prompts: What else would make you want to learn languages more?
Does choice of language in Y8 make a difference?

More independent learning?
Which of the points you've made is the most important for you?)

Section 3 (5 mins)
You have done a number of units of work in Y7-9 e.g. school, shopping, cafes.
Flipchart: What topics/units would *you* include in Y7? What in Y8 & 9?

Section 4 (5 mins)
Some of you said you should be taught more about the countries whose languages you are learning.
Flipchart: Brainstorm topics.

F: Ending questions (10 mins)

Draw onto board a Likert scale, 1-4.
On a piece of paper, draw 2 scales like this.

1. Place yourself on a scale of 1-4 for how much you enjoy languages (label it 'enjoy').

   1 = enjoy a lot, 4 = don't enjoy at all

2. Place yourself on scale of 1-4 for how much you want to learn languages, whether you enjoy them here at school or not (label it 'want')

   1 = determined to learn a language, 4 = definitely don't want to learn a language

Discuss what you have put down:

Reasons for putting that down?
How does this compare with other subjects?
Where would your language teacher place you?
Is this accurate? (Why? Why not?)

G: Conclusions (5 mins).

Thank you for taking part in this research.
How did you find the meetings?
What did you enjoy about them?
What did you not enjoy about them?
Why do you think you were selected?
Have you changed in any way, no matter how small, as a result of these meetings?
Do you think there should be research like this, finding out what your views on school and learning are?

APPENDIX 9

Research Project

The student bearing this pass is assisting in a research project at lunchtime. Please allow them into dinner early.

R.C. P.

APPENDIX 10

Dear Parent/Guardian,

For a number of years I have been conducting research into the learning of foreign languages in schools. This follows sixteen years of experience teaching French and German in a range of schools in London and Derbyshire. My particular interests are in finding ways of making language learning more successful and in looking at what learners find useful and motivating.

Last year I conducted some initial research at Borough School which involved spending time in language lessons. I am now about to start the next phase of my research which will involve working with small groups of Year 9 students. There will be six students in each group and we shall meet about six or seven times, sometimes in lesson time and sometimes at lunch time. The aim is to find out students' views about what they enjoy and don't enjoy, what they find helpful or unhelpful, and how they learn. They should find the meetings both enjoyable and useful.

I am writing to ask your permission for your child to take part in this research. Students have been randomly selected by their teachers and myself. Participation will be recorded in their Records of Achievement, but their views will remain anonymous (unless they want their names mentioned in any publication which results from the research!).

I do hope you will agree to this. As an ex-Borough School student myself, I would like to make the most of this opportunity to support your child's learning. Please do not hesitate to contact me via school if you want to talk further about this. I would be happy to meet you either at school or at your home.

Yours sincerely,

Terry Lamb, Lecturer in Education

APPENDIX 11

Name and group	Mod 1	Mod 2	Mod 3	Mod 4	Points	Final GCSE grade
Helen A1	D	E	D	F	124	E
Nadia A1	G	G	D	G	46	G
Louis A1, then B1	C	C	B	E	164	D
Peter A1	D	E	G	G	68	F
Carol A1	D	C	C	E	153	D
Carl A1	D	C	D	G	104	E
Luke A2	E	D	F	G	69	F
Candice A2	E	F	G	G	54	G
Darren A2	D	-	D	U	54	G
James A2	x	x	x	x	x	x
Katy A2	x	x	x	x	x	x
Penny A2	D	D	E	G	106	E
Robert B1	C	D	C	E	166	D
Annie B1	B	E	A	D	180	C
Jodie B1	B	D	A	C	213	C
Jimmy B1	A	A	A	B	249	B
Mark B1	B	A	C	B	235	B
Lucy B1	A	C	B	A	249	B
Mick B2	B	C	D	E	151	D
Becky B2	E	D	D	F	111	E
Andy B2	B	D	E	E	153	D
Amy B2	x	x	x	x	x	x
Lorna B2	A	D	B	E	172	D
Steve B2	A	C	B	E	178	D